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WORDS;

THEIR USE AND ABUSE.

BY

WILLIAM MATHEWS, LL.D.,

AUTHOR OF "GETTING ON IN THE WORLD," "ORATORY AND ORATORS," ETC., ETC.

Die Sprache ist nichts anderes als der in die Erscheinung tretende Gedanke und beide sind innerlich nur eins und dasselbe.—BECKER.

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Language and thought are inseparable. Words without thought are dead sounds; thoughts without words are nothing. To think is to speak low; to speak is to think aloud. The word is the thought incarnate.—Max Müller.

A winged word hath struck ineradically in a million hearts, and envenomed every hour throughout their hard pulsation. On a winged word hath hung the destiny of nations. On a winged word hath human wisdom been willing to cast the immortal soul, and to leave it dependent for all its future happiness.—W. S. Landor.

Words are things; and a small drop of ink, falling like dew upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.—Byron.

A dead language is full of all monumental remembrances of the people who spoke it. Their swords and their shields are in it; their faces are pictured on its walls; and their very voices ring still through its recesses.—B. W. Dwight.

Every sentence of the great writer is like an autograph. . . If Milton had endorsed a bill of exchange with half-a-dozen blank-verse lines, it would be as good as his name, and would be accepted as good evidence in court.—Alexander Smith.

If there be a human talent, let it get into the tongue, and make melody with that organ. The talent that can say nothing for itself, what is it? Nothing; or a thing that can do mere drudgeries, and at best make money by railways.—Carlyle.

Human language may be polite and powerless in itself, uplifted with difficulty into expression by the high thoughts it utters, or it may in itself become so saturated with warm life and delicious association that every sentence shall palpitate and thrill with the mere fascination of the syllables.—T. W. Higginson.

Accustom yourself to reflect on the words you use, hear, or read, their birth, derivation, and history. For if words are not things, they are living powers, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined, and harmonized.—Coleridge.

Words possess an endless, indefinable, tantalizing charm. They paint humanity in its thoughts, longings, aspirations, struggles, failures—paint it upon a canvas of breath, in the colors of life.—Anon.

Ye know not what hurt ye do to Learning, that care not for Words, but for Matter, and so make a Divorce betwixt the Tongue and the Heart.—Ascham.

Let him who would rightly understand the grandeur and dignity of speech, meditate on the deep mystery involved in the revelation of the Lord Jesus as the Word of God.—F. W. Farrar.

Words are lighter than the cloud foam
Of the restless ocean spray;
Vainer than the trembling shadow
That the next hour steals away;
By the fall of summer rain-drops
Is the air as deeply stirred;
And the rose leaf that we tread on
Will outlive a word.

Yet on the dull silence breaking
With a lightning flash, a word,
Bearing endless desolation
On its blighting wings, I heard.
Earth can forge no keener weapon,
Dealing surer death and pain,
And the cruel echo answered
Through long years again.

I have known one word hang star-like
O'er a dreary waste of years,
And it only shone the brighter
Looked at through a mist of tears,
While a weary wanderer gathered
Hope and heart on life's dark way.
By its faithful promise shining
Clearer day by day.

I have known a spirit calmer
Then the calmest lake, and clear
As the heavens that gazed upon it,
With no wave of hope or fear;
But a storm had swept across it,
And its deepest depths were stirred,
Never, never more to slumber,
Only by a word.

ADELAIDE A. PROCTER

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

THE unexpected favor with which this work has been received by the public from year to year, since its publication in 1873, has made the author anxious to render it more worthy of regard. He has, therefore, carefully revised the work, corrected some errors, and added two new chapters, one on "Onomatopes," the other on "Names of Men," besides many pages on the subjects of the other chapters.

Professor G. P. Marsh, in his "Lectures on the English Language," quotes the saying of a distinguished British scholar of the last century, that he had known but three of his countrymen who spoke their native language with uniform grammatical accuracy; and the Professor adds that "the observation of most persons acquainted with English and American society confirms the general truth implied in this declaration." In this statement, made by one of the most eminent philologists of the day, is found, at least, a partial justification of works like the present, if they are properly written. The author is well aware that, in writing such a book, he is obnoxious to the complaint of Goethe, that "everybody thinks that, because he can speak, he is entitled to speak about language;" he is aware, too, that in his criticisms on the misuses and abuses of words, he has exposed himself to criticism; and it may

be that he has been guilty of some of the very sins which he has condemned. If so, he sins in good company, since nearly all of his predecessors, who have written on the same theme, have been found guilty of a similar inconsistency, from Lindley Murray down to Dean Alford, Breen, Moon, Marsh, and Fowler. If the public is to hear no philological sermons till the preachers are faultless, it will have to wait forever. "The only impeccable authors," says Hazlitt, "are those who never wrote."

It is hardly necessary to add that the work is designed for popular reading, rather than for scholars. How much the author is indebted to others, he cannot say. He has been travelling, in his own way, over old and well worn ground, and has picked up his materials freely from all the sources within his reach. *Non nova, sed nové*, has been his aim; he regrets that he has not accomplished it more to his satisfaction. The world, it has been truly said, does not need new thoughts so much as it needs that old thoughts be recast. There are some writers, however, to whom he has been particularly indebted; they are Archbishop Trench, the Rev. Matthew Harrison, author of "The Rise, Progress, and Present Structure of the English Language," Professor G. P. Marsh, and especially Archdeacon F. W. Farrar, the last of whom in his three linguistic works has shown the ability to invest the driest scientific themes with interest. A list of the books consulted will be found on pages 479, 480.

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WORDS; THEIR USE AND ABUSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORDS.

"Speech is morning to the mind;
It spreads the beauteous images abroad,
Which else lie dark and buried in the soul."

La parole, cette main de l'esprit.—CHARRON.

Syllables govern the world.—COKE.

TO the thoughtful man, who has reflected on the common operations of life, which, but for their commonness, would be deemed full of marvel, few things are more wonderful than the origin, structure, history and significance of words. The tongue is the glory of man; for though animals have memory, will and intellect, yet language, which gives us a duplicate and multipliable existence,—enabling mind to communicate with mind,—is the Rubicon which they never have dared to cross. The dog barks as it barked at the creation; the owl hoots in the same octaves in which it screamed ages ago; and the crow of the cock is the same to-day as when it startled the ear of repentant Peter. The song of the lark and the howl of the leopard have continued as unchangeable as the concentric circles of the spider and the waxen hexagon of the bee; and even the stoutest champion of the orang-outang the-

ory of man's origin will admit that no process of natural selection has yet distilled significant words out of the cries of beasts or the notes of birds. Though we have little reason to doubt that animals think, there is yet no proof that a single noise made by them expresses a thought, and especially an abstraction or a generalization, properties characterizing the language of man. He only, in this world, is able to classify objects which in some respects resemble, and in others differ from one another, and to analyze and decompound the various objects of thought; and to him is limited the privilege of designating by arbitrary signs, and describing by distinctive terms, the things he thus comprehends. Speech is a divine gift. It is the last seal of dignity stamped by God upon His intelligent offspring, and proves, more conclusively than his upright form, or his looks "commercing with the skies," that he was made in the image of God. Without this crowning gift to man, even reason would have been comparatively valueless; for he would have felt himself to be imprisoned even when at large, solitary in the midst of a crowd; and the society of the wisest of his race would have been as uninstructive as that of barbarians and savages. The rude tongue of a Patagonian or Australian is full of wonders to the philosopher; but as we ascend in the scale of being from the uncouth sounds which express the desires of a savage to the lofty periods of a Cicero or a Chatham, the power of words expands until it attains to regions far above the utmost range of our capacity. It designates, as Novalis has said, God with three letters, and the infinite with as many syllables, though the ideas conveyed by these words are immeasurably beyond the utmost grasp of man. In every relation of life, at every moment

of our active being, in every thing we think or do, it is on the meaning and inflection of a *word* that the direction of our thoughts, and the expression of our will, turn. The soundness of our reasonings, the clearness of our belief and of our judgment, the influence we exert upon others, and the manner in which we are impressed by our fellow-men,— all depend upon a knowledge of the value of words. It is in language that the treasures of human knowledge, the discoveries of Science, and the achievements of Art are chiefly preserved; it is language that furnishes the poet with the airy vehicle for his most delicate fancies, the orator with the elements of his electrifying eloquence, the savant with the record of his classification, the metaphysician with the means of his sharp distinction, the statesman with the drapery of his vast design, and the philosopher with the earthly instrument of his heaven-reaching induction.

"Words," said the fierce Mirabeau, in reply to an opponent in the National Assembly, "are *things;*" and truly they were such when *he* thundered them forth from the Tribune, full of life, meaning and power. Words are always things, when coming from the lips of a master-spirit, and instinct with his own individuality. Especially is this true of so impassioned orators as Mirabeau, who have thoughts impatient for words, not words starving for thoughts, and who but give utterance to the spirit breathed by the whole Third Estate of a nation. Their words are not merely things, but *living* things, endowed with power not only to communicate ideas, but to convey, as by spiritual conductors, the shock and thrill which attended their birth. Hazlitt, fond as he was of paradox, did not exaggerate when he said that "words are the only things that

live forever." History shows that temples and palaces, mausoleums and monuments built at enormous cost and during years of toil to perpetuate the memory or preserve the ashes of ancient kings, have perished, and left not even a trace of their existence. The pyramids of Egypt have, indeed, escaped in some degree the changes and chances of thousands of years; yet an earthquake may suddenly engulf these masses of stone, and "leave the sand of the desert as blank as the tide would have left it on the sea shore." A sudden accident may cause the destruction of the finest masterpieces of art, and the Sistine Madonna, the Apollo Belvedere, or the Venus de Medicis, upon which millions have gazed with rapture, may be hopelessly injured or irretrievably ruined. A mob shivers into dust the statue of Minerva, whose lips seemed to move, and whose limbs seemed to breathe under the flowing robe; a tasteless director of the Dresden Gallery removes the toning of Correggio's "Notte," where the light breaks from the heavenly child, and deprives the picture of one of its fairest charms; an inferior pencil retouches the great Vandyck at Wilton, and destroys the harmony of its colors; and though no such mishap as these befall the product of the painter's skill, yet how often,—

> "When a new world leaps out at his command,
> And ready nature waits upon his hand;
> When the ripe colors soften and unite,
> And sweetly melt into just shade and light;
> When mellowing years their full perfection give
> And each bold figure just begins to live.
> The treacherous colors the fair art betray,
> And all the bright creation fades away."

Not so with words. The language which embodies the ideas and emotions of a great poet or thinker, though entrusted to perishable ink and paper, which a moth or a

few drops of water may destroy, is indestructible, and, when his body has turned to dust, he continues to rule men by the power of his thought, — not "from his urn," like a dead hero whose deeds only are remembered, but by his very spirit, living, breathing and speaking in his works. Look at the "winged words" of old Homer, into which he breathed the breath of his own spiritual life; how long have they kept on the wing! For twenty-five or thirty centuries they have maintained their flight across gulfs of time in which empires have suffered shipwreck, and the languages of common life have sunk into oblivion; and they are still full of the life-blood of immortal youth. "The 'Venus' of Apelles, and the 'grapes' of Zeuxis have vanished, and the music of Timotheus is gone; but the bowers of Circe still remain unfaded, and the 'chained Prometheus' has outlived the 'Cupid' of Praxiteles, and the 'brazen bull' of Perillus."

"How forcible," says Job, "are right words!" "A word fitly spoken," says Solomon, "is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." No artificer's hand, however cunning, can contrive a mechanism comparable with those masterpieces of ingenuity that may be wrought by him who can convey a great or noble thought in apt and vivid words. A mosaic of words may be made more beautiful than any of inlaid precious stones. Few persons have duly estimated the power of language. In anatomical museums one will sometimes see the analysis of a man, — that is, the mere chemical constituents, so much lime, so much albumen, so much phosphorus, etc. These dead substances fail not more utterly in representing a living man, with his mental and moral force, than do the long rows of words in the lexicon of exhibiting the power with which, as signs

of ideas, they may be endowed. Language has been truly pronounced the armory of the human mind, which contains at once the trophies of its past and the weapons of its future conquests. Look at a Webster or a Calhoun, when his mighty enginery of thought is in full operation; how his words tell upon his adversary, battering down the intrenchments of sophistry like shot from heavy ordnance! Cannon-shot are very harmless things when piled up for show; so are words when tiered up in the pages of a dictionary, with no mind to select and send them home to the mark. But let them receive the vitalizing touch of genius, and how they leap with life; with what tremendous energy are they endowed! When the little Corsican bombarded Cadiz at the distance of five miles, it was deemed the very triumph of engineering; but what was this paltry range to that of words, which bombard the ages yet to come? "Scholars," says Sir Thomas Browne, "are men of peace. They carry no arms, but their tongues are sharper than Actus his razors; their pens carry further and make a louder report than thunder. I had rather stand the shock of a basalisco than the fury of a merciless pen."

The words which a man of genius selects are as much his own as his thoughts. They are not the dress, but the incarnation, of his thought, as the body contains the soul. As John Foster once said, "his diction is not the clothing of his sentiments, it is the skin; and to alter the language would be to flay the sentiments alive." Analyze a speech by either of the great orators I have just named, and a critical study will satisfy you that the crushing force of his arguments lies not less in the nicety and skill with which the words are chosen, than in the granite-like strength of his thought. Attempt to substitute other

words for those that are used, and you will find that the latter are part and parcel of the speaker's mind and conception; that every word is accommodated with marvellous exactness to all the sinuosities of the thought; that not even the most insignificant term can be changed without marring the force and completeness of the author's idea. If any other words can be used than those which a writer does use, he is a bungling rhetorician, and skims only the surface of his theme. True as this is of the best prose, it is doubly true of the best poetry; it is a linked strain throughout. It has been said by one who was himself a consummate master of language, that if, in the recollection of any passage of Shakespeare, a word shall escape your memory, you may hunt through the forty thousand words in the language, and not one shall fit the vacant place but that which the poet put there. Though he uses only the simplest and homeliest terms, yet "you might as well think," says Coleridge, "of pushing a brick out of a wall with your forefinger, as attempt to remove a word out of any of the finished passages of Shakespeare."

Who needs to be told how much the wizard sorcery of Milton depends on the words he uses? It is not in what he directly tells us that his spell lies, but in the immense suggestiveness of his verse. In Homer, it has been justly said, there are no hidden meanings, no deeps of thought into which the soul descends for lingering contemplation; no words which are key-notes, awakening the spirit's melodies,—

> "Untwisting all the links that tie
> The hidden soul of harmony."

But here is the realm of Milton's mastery. He electrifies the mind through conductors. His words, as Macaulay

declares, are charmed. Their meaning bears no proportion to their effect. "No sooner are they pronounced, than the past is present and the distant near. New forms of beauty start at once into existence, and all the burial places of the memory give up their dead. Change the structure of the sentence, substitute one synonym for another, and the whole effect is destroyed. The spell loses its power; and he who should then hope to conjure with it would find himself as much mistaken as Cassim in the Arabian tale, when he stood crying 'Open Wheat,' 'Open Barley,' to the door which obeyed no sound but 'Open Sesame.'"

The force and significance which Milton can infuse into the simplest word are strikingly shown in his description of the largest of land animals, in "Paradise Lost." In a single line the unwieldy monster is so represented as coming from the ground, that we almost involuntarily start aside from fear of being crushed by the living mass:—

> "Behemoth, the biggest born of earth, upheaved
> His vastness."

Note, again, that passage in which Death at hell-gates threatens the Arch-Fiend, Satan:—

> "Back to thy punishment,
> False fugitive! and to thy speed add wings,
> Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue
> Thy lingering,—or, with one stroke of this dart,
> Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before!"

"The hand of a master," says Montgomery, "is felt through every movement of this sentence, especially toward the close, where it seems to grapple with the throat of the reader; the hard *staccato* stops that well might take the breath, in attempting to pronounce 'or, with one stroke of this dart,' are followed by an explosion of sound in the last

line, like a heavy discharge of artillery, in which, though a full syllable is interpolated even at the cæsural pause, it is carried off almost without the reader perceiving the surplusage." No poet better understood than Milton the art of heightening the majesty of his strains by an occasional sacrifice of their harmony. By substituting quantities for accented verse, he produces an effect like that of the skilful organist who throws into the full tide of instrumental music an occasional discord, giving intenser sweetness to the notes that follow.

It is this necromantic power over language,— this skill in striking "the electric chain with which we are darkly bound," till its vibrations thrill along the chords of the heart, and its echoes ring in all the secret chambers of the soul,— which blinds us to the absurdities of "Paradise Lost." While following this mighty magician of language through

> —— "many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out,"

we overlook the incongruity with which he makes angels fight with "villanous saltpetre" and divinities talk Calvinism, puts the subtleties of Greek syntax into the mouth of Eve, and exhibits the Omnipotent Father arguing like a school divine. As with Milton, so with his great predecessor, Dante. Wondrous as is his power of creating pictures in a few lines, he owes it mainly to the directness, simplicity, and intensity of his language. In him "the invisible becomes visible; darkness becomes palpable; silence describes a character; a word acts as a flash of lightning, which displays some gloomy neighborhood where a tower is standing, with dreadful faces at the window."

The difference in the use of words by different writers

is as great as that in the use of paints by great and poor artists; and there is as great a difference in the effect upon the understanding and the sensibilities of their readers. Who that is familiar with Bacon's writings can ever fail to recognize one of his sentences, so dense with pith, and going to the mark as if from a gun? In him, it has been remarked, language was always the flexible and obedient instrument of the thought; not, as in the productions of a lower order of mind, its rebellious and recalcitrant slave. "All authors below the highest seem to use the mighty gift of expression with a certain secret timidity, lest the lever should prove too ponderous for the hand that essays to wield it; or rather, they resemble the rash student in the old legend, who was overmastered by the demons which he had unguardedly provoked." Who that is familiar with Dryden's "full, resounding line," has not admired the magic effects he produces with the most familiar words? Macaulay well says that in the management of the scientific vocabulary he succeeded as completely as his contemporary, Gibbons, succeeded in carving the most delicate flowers from heart of oak. The toughest and most knotty parts of language became ductile at his touch. Emerson, in speaking of the intense vitality of Montaigne's words, says that if you cut them, they will bleed. Joubert, in revealing the secret of Rousseau's charm, says: "He imparted, if I may so speak, *bowels of feeling* to the words he used (*donna des entrailles à tous les mots*), and poured into them such a charm, sweetness so penetrating, energy so puissant, that his writings have an effect upon the soul something like that of those illicit pleasures which steal away our taste and intoxicate our understanding." So in the weird poetic fictions of Coleridge there is an indescribable witchery of

phrase and conceit that affects the imagination as if one had eaten of "the insane root that takes the reason prisoner."

How much is the magic of Tennyson's verse due to "the fitting of aptest words to things," which we find on every page of his poetry! He has not only the vision, but the faculty divine, and no secret of his art is hid from him. Foot and pause, rhyme and rhythm, alliteration; subtle, penetrative words that touch the very quick of the truth; cunning words that have a spell in them for the memory and the imagination; old words, with their weird influence,

"Bright through the rubbish of some hundred years,"

and words used for the occasion in their primary sense, are all his ministers, and obedient to his will. An American writer, Mr. E. C. Stedman, in speaking of Swinburne's marvellous gift of melody, asks: "Who taught him all the hidden springs of melody? He was born a tamer of words, a subduer of this most stubborn, yet most copious of the literary tongues. In his poetry we discover qualities we did not know were in the language — a softness that seemed Italian, a rugged strength we thought was German, a blithe and debonair lightness we despaired of capturing from the French. He has added a score of new stops and pedals to the instrument. He has introduced, partly from other tongues, stanzaic forms, measures and effects untried before, and has brought out the swiftness and force of metres like the anapestic, carrying each to perfection at a single trial. Words in his hands are like the ivory balls of a juggler, and all words seem to be in his hands."

Words, with such men, are "nimble and airy servitors," not masters, and from the exquisite skill with which they

are chosen, and the firmness with which they are knit together, are sometimes "half battles, stronger than most men's deeds." What is the secret of the weird-like power of De Quincey? Is it not that, of all late English writers, he has the most imperial dominion over the resources of expression; that he has weighed, as in a hair-balance, the precise significance of every word he uses; that he has conquered so completely the stubbornness of our vernacular as to render it a willing slave to all the whims and caprices, the ever-shifting, kaleidoscopic variations of his thought? Turn to whatever page you will of his writings, and it is not the thorough grasp of his subject, the enormous erudition, the extraordinary breadth and piercing acuteness of intellect which he displays, that excite your greatest surprise; but you feel that here is a man who has gauged the potentiality of every word he uses, who has analyzed the simples of his every compound phrase. In his hands our stiff Saxon language becomes almost as ductile as the Greek. Ideas that seem to defy expression,—ideas so subtile, or so vague and shifting, that most thinkers find it difficult to contemplate them at all,—are conveyed on his page with a nicety, a felicity of phrase, that might almost provoke the envy of Shakespeare. In the hands of a great sculptor marble and bronze become as soft and elastic as living flesh, and not unlike this is the dominion which the great writers possess over language. In their verse our rugged but pithy and expressive English breathes all sounds, all melodies;

> "And now 'tis like all instruments,
> Now like a lonely flute,
> And now it is an angel's song,
> That makes the heavens be mute."

The superiority of the writers of the seventeenth cen-

tury to those of our own day is due not less to their choice and collocation of words than to their weight of thought. There was no writing public nor reading populace in that age; the writers were few and intellectual, and they addressed themselves to learned, or, at least, to studious and thoughtful readers. "The structure of their language," says Henry Taylor, "is itself an evidence that they counted upon another frame of mind, and a different pace and speed in reading, from that which can alone be looked to by the writers of these days. Their books were not written to be snatched up, run through, talked over, and forgotten; and their diction, therefore, was not such as lent wings to haste and impatience, making everything so clear that he who ran or flew might read. Rather was it so constructed as to detain the reader over what was pregnant and profound, and compel him to that brooding and prolific posture of mind by which, if he had wings, they might help him to some more genial and profitable employment than that of running like an ostrich through a desert. And hence those characteristics of diction by which these writers are made more fit than those who have followed them to train the ear and utterance of a poet. For if we look at the long-suspended sentences of those days, with all their convolutions and intertextures,— the many parts waiting for the ultimate wholeness,— we shall perceive that without distinctive movement and rhythmical significance of a very high order, it would be impossible that they could be sustained in any sort of clearness. One of these writers' sentences is often in itself a work of art, having its strophes and antistrophes, its winding changes and recalls, by which the reader, though conscious of plural voices and running

divisions of thought, is not, however, permitted to dissociate them from their mutual concert and dependency, but required, on the contrary, to give them entrance into his mind, opening it wide enough for the purpose, as one compacted and harmonious fabric. Sentences thus elaborately constructed, and complex, though musical, are not easy to a remiss reader, but they are clear and delightful to an intent reader."

Few persons are aware how much knowledge is sometimes necessary to give the etymology and definition of a word. In 1839 the British Court of Queen's Bench,— Sir F. Pollock, Mr. Justice Coleridge, the Attorney General, Sir J. Campbell, and other learned lawyers,— disputed for some hours about the meaning of the word "upon," as a preposition of time; whether it meant "after" or "before." It is easy to define words as certain persons satirized by Pascal have defined *light:* "A luminary movement of luminous bodies"; or as a Western judge once defined *murder* to a jury: "Murder, gentlemen, is when a man is murderously killed. It is the *murdering* that constitutes murder in the eye of the law. Murder, in short, is — murder." We have all smiled at Johnson's definition of *network:* "Network — anything reticulated or decussed at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections." Many of the definitions in our dictionaries remind one of Bardolph's attempt to analyze the term *accommodation:* "Accommodation,— that is, when a man is, as they say, accommodated; or when a man is being whereby he may be thought to be accommodated, which is an excellent thing." *Brimstone*, for example, the lexicographer defines by telling us that it is *sulphur;* and then rewards us for the trouble we have had in turning to *sulphur*,

by telling us that it is *brimstone*. The eccentric Davy Crockett, whose exterior roughness veiled a great deal of mother wit, happily characterized this whole tribe of lexicographers by a remark he once made to a Western member of Congress. When the latter, in a speech on a bill for increasing the number of hospitals, wearied his hearers by incessant repetition,—"Sit down," whispered Crockett, "you are coming out of the same hole you went in at." There is a mythical story that the forty members of the French Academy once undertook to define the word *crab*, and hit upon this, which they deemed quite satisfactory: "Crab,—a small red fish, which walks backward." "Perfect, gentlemen," said Cuvier, when interrogated touching the correctness of the definition; "perfect,—only I will make one small observation in natural history. The crab is *not* a fish, it is *not* red, and it does *not* walk backward. With these exceptions, your definition is admirable." Too many easily made definitions are liable to similar damaging exceptions.

The truth is, no word can be truly defined until the exact idea is understood, in all its relations, which the word is designed to represent. Let a man undertake to define the word "alkali" or "acid," for instance, and he will have to encounter some pretty hard problems in chemistry. Lavoisier, the author of the terminology of modern chemistry, tells us that when he undertook to form a nomenclature of that science, and while he proposed to himself nothing more than to improve the chemical language, his work transformed itself by degrees, and without his being able to prevent it, into a treatise upon the elements of chemistry. Often a theory or an argument, which seems clear and convincing in its disembodied form, is found to be

incoherent and altogether unsatisfactory as soon as it is fixed in words on paper. Samuel Bailey, who held a derivative opinion in favor of Berkeley's "Theory of Vision," tells us that having, in the course of a philosophical discussion, occasion to explain it, he found, on attempting to state *in his own language* the grounds on which it rested, that they no longer appeared to him to be so clear and conclusive as he had fancied them to be. He determined, therefore, to make them the subject of a patient and dispassionate examination; and the result was a clear conviction of the erroneousness of Berkeley's theory, the philosophical grounds for which conviction he has so ably and luminously set forth in his book on the subject. The truth is, accurate definitions of the terms of any science can only follow accurate and sharply defined notions of the science itself. Try to define the words *matter*, *substance*, *idea*, *will*, *cause*, *conscience*, *virtue*, *right*, and you will soon ascertain whether you have grappled with the grand problems or only skimmed the superficies of metaphysics and ethics.

Daniel O'Connell once won a law-suit by the knowledge furnished him of the etymology of a word. He was engaged in a case where the matter at issue was certain river-rights, especially touching a branch of the stream known by the name of the "Lax Weir." His clients were in possession of rights formerly possessed by a defunct salmon-fishing company, formed by strangers from Denmark, and they claimed the privilege of obstructing the "Lax Weir" for the purposes of their fishery, while the opposite party contended that it should be open to navigation. A natural inference from the name of the piece of water in question seemed to turn the scale against O'Connell; for how could he establish the right to make that a close weir which, ever

since the first existence of the fishery, had been notoriously a lax one? His cause seemed desperate, and he had given up all hope of success, when victory was wrested from his adversaries by a couple of lines on a scrap of paper that was handed to him across the court. These lines informed him that in the language of Germany, and the north of Europe, *lachs*, or *lax*, means a salmon. The "Lax Weir" was simply a salmon weir. By the aid of this bit of philological knowledge, O'Connell won not only a verdict for his client, but for himself a great and sudden growth of his reputation as a young advocate.

Let no one, then, underrate the importance of the study of words. Daniel Webster was often seen absorbed in the study of an English dictionary. Lord Chatham read the folio dictionary of Bailey twice through, examining each word attentively, dwelling on its peculiar import and modes of construction, and thus endeavoring to bring the whole range of our language completely under his control. One of the most distinguished American authors is said to be in the habit of reading the dictionary through about once a year. His choice of fresh and forceful terms has provoked at times the charge of pedantry; but, in fact, he has but fearlessly used the wealth of the language that lies buried in the pages of Noah Webster. It is only by thus working in the mines of language that one can fill his storehouses of expression, so as to be above the necessity of using cheap and common words, or even using these with no subtle discrimination of their meanings. William Pinkney, the great American advocate, studied the English language profoundly, not so much to acquaint himself with the nice distinctions of its philosophical terms, as to acquire copiousness, variety, and splendor of

expression. He studied the dictionary, page after page, content with nothing less than a mastery of the whole language, as a body of expression, in its primitive and derivative stock. Rufus Choate once said to one of his students; "You don't want a diction gathered from the newspapers, caught from the air, common and unsuggestive; but you want one whose every word is full-freighted with suggestion and association, with beauty and power." The leading languages of the world are full of such words, "opulent, microcosmic, in which histories are imaged, which record civilizations. Others recall to us great passages of eloquence, or of noble poetry, and bring in their train the whole splendor of such passages, when they are uttered."

Mr. Disraeli says of Canning, that he had at command the largest possible number of terms, both "rich and rare,"—words most vivid and effective,—really spirit-stirring words; for words there are, as every poet knows, whose sound is an echo to the sense,—words which, while by their literal meaning they convey an idea to the mind, have also a sound and an association which are like music to the ear, and a picture to the eye,—vivid, graphic, and picturesque words, that make you almost see the thing described. It is said of Keats, that when reading Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton, he became a critic of their thoughts, their words, their rhymes, and their cadences. He brooded over fine phrases like a lover; and often, when he met a quaint or delicious word in the course of his reading, he would take pains to make it his own by using it, as speedily as possible, in some poem he was writing. Upon expressions like "the sea-shouldering whale" of Spenser, he would dwell with an ecstasy of delight. It is said of

Theophile Gautier, whose language is remarkable for its copiousness and splendor, that he enriched his picturesque vocabulary from the most recondite sources, and that his favorite reading was the dictionary. He loved words for themselves, their look, their aroma, their color, and kept a supply of them constantly on hand, which he introduced at effective points.

The question has been often discussed whether, if man were deprived of articulate speech, he would still be able to think, and to express his thought. The example of the deaf and dumb, who evidently think, not by associations of sound, but of touch,—using combinations of finger-speech, instead of words, as the symbols of their thought,—appears to show that he might find a partial substitute for his present means of reflection. The telegraph and railway signals are, in fact, new modes of speech, which are quickly familiarized by practice. The engine driver shuts off the steam at the warning signal, without thinking of the words to which it is equivalent; a particular signal becomes associated with a particular act, and the interposition of words becomes useless. It is well known that persons skilled in gesticulation can communicate by it a long series of facts and even complicated trains of thought. Roscius, the Roman actor, claimed that he could express a sentiment in a greater variety of ways by significant gestures than Cicero could by language. During the reign of Augustus, both tragedies and comedies were acted, with powerful effect, by pantomime alone. When the Megarians wanted help from the Spartans, and threw down an empty meal-bag before the assembly, declaring that "it lacked meal," these verbal economists said that "the mention of the sack was superfluous." When the Scythian ambassadors wished

to convince Darius of the hopelessness of invading their country, they made no long harangue, but argued with far more cogency by merely bringing him a bird, a mouse, a frog, and two arrows, to imply that unless he could soar like a bird, burrow like a mouse, and hide in the marshes like a frog, he would never be able to escape their shafts. Every one has heard of the Englishman in China, who, wishing to know the contents of a dish which lay before him, asked "Quack, quack?" and received in reply the words "Bow-wow." The language of gesture is so well understood in Italy that it is said that when King Ferdinand returned to Naples after the revolutionary movements of 1822, he made an address to the lazzaroni from the balcony of the palace, wholly by signs; and though made amidst the most tumultuous shouts, they were perfectly intelligible to the assemblage. It is traditionally affirmed that the famous conspiracy of the Sicilian Vespers was organized wholly by facial signs, not even the hand being employed. Energetic and faithful, however, as gesture is as a means of expression, it is in the domain of feeling and persuasion, and for embellishing and enforcing our ordinary language, that it is chiefly useful. The conventionality of language, which can be parroted where there is little thought or feeling, deprives it in many cases of its force; and it is a common remark that a look, a tone, or a gesture is often more eloquent than the most elaborate speech. But it is only the most general facts of a situation that gesture can express; it is incapable of distinguishing or decomposing them, and utterly fails to express the delicate shades of difference of which verbal expression is capable. Natural expression, from the cry and groan, and laugh and smile, up to the most delicate variations of tone

and feature which the elocutionist uses, is emotional, subjective, and cannot convey an intellectual conception, a judgment, or a cognition.

Facts like these tend to show that man might still have been, as the root of the word "man" implies in Sanskrit, "a thinking being," though he had never been a "speech-dividing" being; but it is evident that his range of thought would have been exceedingly narrow, and that his mightiest triumphs over nature would have been impossible. While it may be true, as Tennyson says, that

> "Thought leapt out to wed with thought,
> Ere thought could wed itself to speech,"

yet there is an intimate relation between *ratio* and *oratio*, and it may well be doubted whether, without *some* signs, verbal or of another sort, thought, except of the simplest kind, would not have been beyond man's power. Long use has so familiarized us with language, we employ it so readily, and without conscious effort, that we are apt to regard it as a matter of course, and become blind to its mystery and deep significance. We rarely think of the long and changeful history through which each word we utter has passed, — of the many changes in form and changes in signification it has undergone, — and of the time and toil spent in its invention and elaboration by successive generations of thinkers and speakers. Still less do we think how different man's history would have been, how comparatively useless would have been all his other endowments, had God not given him the faculties "which, out of the shrieks of birds in the forest, the roar of beasts, the murmur of rushing waters, the sighing of the wind, and his own impulsive ejaculations, have constructed the great instrument that Demosthenes, and Shakespeare, and

Massillon wielded, the instrument by which the laws of the universe are unfolded, and the subtle workings of the human heart brought to light." Language is not only a means of communication between man and man, but it has other functions hardly less important. It is only by its aid that we are able to analyze our complex impressions, to preserve the results of the analysis, and to abbreviate the processes of thought.

Were we content with the bare reception of visual impressions, we could to some extent dispense with words; but as the mind does not receive its impressions passively, but reflects upon them, decomposes them into their parts, and compares them with notions already stored up, it becomes necessary to give to each of these elements a name. By virtue of these names we are able to keep them apart in the mind, and to recall them with precision and facility, just as the chemist by the labels on his jars, or the gardener by those on his flower-pots, is enabled to identify the substances these vessels contain. Thus reflections which when past might have been dissipated forever, are by their connection with language brought always within reach. Who can estimate the amount of investigation and thought which are represented by such words as *gravitation*, *chemical affinity*, *atomic weight*, *capital*, *inverse proportion*, *polarity*, and *inertia*, — words which are each the quintessence and final result of an infinite number of anterior mental processes, and which may be compared to the paper money, or bills of exchange, by which the world's wealth may be inclosed in envelopes and sent swiftly to the farthest centres of commerce? Who can estimate the inconvenience that would result, and the degree in which mental activity would be arrested, were we compelled to do without these

comprehensive words which epitomize theories, sum up the labors of the past, and facilitate and abridge future mental processes? The effect would be to restrict all scientific discovery as effectually as commerce and exchange would be restricted, if all transactions had to be carried on with iron or copper as the sole medium of mercantile intercourse.

Language has thus an educational value, for in learning words we are learning to discriminate things. "As the distinctions between the relations of objects grow more numerous, involved, and subtle, it becomes more analytic, to be able to express them; and, inversely, those who are born to be the heirs of a highly analytic language, must needs learn to *think up* to it, to observe and distinguish all the relations of objects, for which they find the expressions already formed; so that we have an instructor for the thinking powers in that speech which we are apt to deem no more than their handmaid and minister." No two things, indeed, are more closely connected than poverty of language and poverty of thought. Language is, on one side, as truly the limit and restraint of thought, as on the other that which feeds and sustains it. Among the "inarticulate ones" of the world, there may be, for aught we know, not a few in whose minds are ideas as grand, pictures as vivid and beautiful, as ever haunted the brain of a poet; but lacking the words which only can express their conceptions, or reveal them in their true majesty to themselves, they must remain "mute, inglorious Miltons" forever. A man of genius who is illiterate, or who has little command of language, is like a painter with no pigments but gray and dun. How, then, shall he paint the purple and crimson of the sunset? Though he may have made the

circuit of the world, and gazed on the main wonders of Nature and of Art, he will have little to say of them beyond commonplace. In bridging the chasm between such a man and one of high culture, the acquisition of words plays as important a part as the acquisition of ideas.

It has been justly said that no man can learn from or communicate to another more than the words they are familiar with either express or can be made to express. The deep degradation of the savage is due as much to the brutal poverty of his language as to other causes. This poverty, again, is due to that deficiency of the power of abstraction which characterizes savages of every land. A savage may have a dozen verbs for "I am here," "I am well," "I am thirsty," etc.; but he has no word for "am": he may have a dozen words for "my head," "your head," etc.; but he can hardly conceive of a head apart from its owner. Nearly all the tongues of the American savages are polysynthetic; that is, whole clauses and even whole sentences are compressed together so violently, that often no single syllable would be capable of separate use. The Abbé Domenech states that such is the absolute deficiency of the simplest abstractions in some of these languages that an Indian cannot say "I smoke" without using such a number of concrete pictures that his immensely long word to represent that monosyllabic action means: "I breathe the vapor of a fire of herb which burns in a stone bowl wedged into a pierced stone." To express the idea of "day," the Pawnees use such a word as *shakoorooces-hairet*, and their word for "tooth" is the fearful polysyllable *khotsiakatatkhusin!* The word for "tongue" in Tlatskanai has twenty-two letters. Though these vocables, which bristle with more consonants than the four sneezes

of a Russian name of note, would be enough, as De Quincey says, "to splinter the teeth of a crocodile," yet Mexican has sounds even more ear-splitting. In this language the common address to a priest is the one word *Notlazomahuizteopixcatatzin;* that is, "Venerable priest, whom I honor as a father." A fagot is *tlatlatlalpistiteutli*, and "if the fagot were of green wood, it could hardly make a greater splutter in the fire." A lover would have been obliged to say "I love you," in this language, in this style, *ni-mits-tsikāwakā-tlasolta*; and instead of a kiss he would have had to ask for a *tetenna-miquilitzli*. "*Dieu merci!*" exclaims the French writer who states this fact, "*quand on a prononcé le mot on a bien mérité la chose.*"

It is easy to see, from these facts, what an obstacle the language of the savage presents to his civilization. Let us suppose a savage to possess extraordinary natural endowments, and to learn any one of the leading languages of Europe; is it not easy to see that he would find himself prepared for labor in departments of mental effort which had been before utterly inaccessible to him, and that he would feel that his powers had been cheated out of their action by this possession of only inferior tools? Hence the knowledge of words is not an elegant accomplishment only, not a luxury, but a positive necessity of the civilized and cultivated man. It is necessary not only to him who would express himself, but to him who would *think*, with precision and effect. There is, indeed, no higher proof of thorough and accurate culture than the fact that a writer, instead of employing words loosely and at hap-hazard, chooses only those which are the exact vesture of his thought. As he only can be called a well dressed man whose clothes exactly fit him, being neither small and

shrunken, nor loose and baggy, so it is the first characteristic of a good style that the words fit close to the ideas. They will be neither too big here, hanging like a giant's robe on the limbs of a dwarf, nor too small there, like a boy's garments into which a man has painfully squeezed himself; but will be the exact correspondents and perfect exponents of his thought. Between the most synonymous words a careful writer will have a choice; for, strictly speaking, there are no synonyms in a language, the most closely resembling and apparently equivalent terms having some nice shade of distinction,— a fine illustration of which is found in Ben Jonson's line, "Men may *securely* sin, but *safely* never"; and, again, in the reply with which Sydney Smith used to meet the cant about popular education in England: "Pooh! pooh! it is the worst *educated* country in the world, I grant you; but it is the best *instructed*." William Pitt was a remarkable example of this precision of style. Fox said of him: "Though I am myself never at a loss for a word, Pitt not only has *a* word, but *the* word,— the very word,— to express his meaning." Robert Hall chose his words with a still more fastidious nicety, and he gave as one reason for his writing so little, that he could so rarely approach the realization of his own *beau-idéal* of a perfect style. It is related of him that, when he was correcting the proofs of his sermon on "Modern Infidelity," on coming to the famous passage, "Eternal God, on what are thine enemies intent? What are those enterprises of guilt and horror, that, for the safety of their performers, require to be enveloped in a darkness which the eye of Heaven must not penetrate?"— he exclaimed to his friend, Dr. Gregory: "*Penetrate!* did I say *penetrate*, sir, when I preached it?" "Yes." "Do you think, sir, I may venture

to alter it? for no man who considers the force of the English language would use a word of three syllables there but from absolute necessity. For *penetrate* put *pierce: pierce* is the word, sir, and the only word, to be used there."

John Foster was a yet more striking example of this conscientiousness and severity in discriminating words. Never, perhaps, was there a writer the electric action of whose mind, telegraphing with all nature's works, was so in contrast with its action in writing. Here it was almost painfully slow, like the expression of some costly oil, drop by drop. He would spend whole days on a few short sentences, passing each word under his concentrated scrutiny, so that each, challenged and examined, took its place in the structure like an inspected soldier in the ranks. When Chalmers, after a visit to London, was asked what Foster was about, he replied: "Hard at it, at the rate of a line a week." Read a page of the essay on "Decision of Character," and you will feel that this was scarcely an exaggeration,— that he stood by the ringing anvil till every word was forged into a bolt. Few persons know how hard easy writing is. Who that reads the light, sparkling verse of Thomas Moore, dreams of the mental pangs, the long and anxious thought, which a single word often cost him? Irving tells us that he was once riding with the Irish poet in the streets of Paris, when the hackney-coach went suddenly into a deep rut, out of which it came with such a jolt as to send their pates bump against the roof. "By Jove, *I've got it!*" cried Moore, clapping his hands with great glee. "Got what?" said Irving. "Why," said the poet, "that *word* I've been hunting for six weeks, to complete my last song. That rascally driver has jolted it out of me."

The ancient writers and speakers were even more nice

and fastidious than the moderns, in their choice and arrangement of words. Virgil, after having spent eleven years in the composition of the Æneid, intended to devote three years to its revision; but, being prevented by his last sickness from giving it the finishing touches which his exquisite judgment deemed necessary, he directed his friends to burn it. The great orator of Athens, to form his style, transcribed Thucydides again and again. He insisted that it was not enough that the orator, in order to prepare for delivery in public, should write down his thoughts,— he must, as it were, *sculpture* them in brass. He must not content himself with that loose use of language which characterizes a thoughtless fluency, but his words must have a precise and exact look, like newly minted coin, with sharply cut edges and devices. That Demosthenes himself "recked his own rede" in this matter we have abundant proof in almost every page of his great speeches. In his masterpieces we are introduced to mysteries of prose composition of which the moderns know nothing. We find him, as a German critic has remarked, bestowing incredible pains, not only upon the choice of words, but upon the sequence of long and short syllables, not in order to produce a regularly recurring metre, but to express the most various emotions of the mind by a suitable and ever-changing rhythm. It is in this art of ordering words with reference to their effect, even more, perhaps, than in the action for which his name is a synonym, that he exhibits his consummate dexterity as an orator. Change their order, and you at once break the charm. The rhythm, in fact, *is* the sense. You destroy the significance of the sentence as well as its ring; you lessen the intensity of the meaning as well as the verbal force. "At his pleasure,"

says Professor Marsh, "he separates his lightning and his thunder by an interval that allows his hearer half to forget the coming detonation, or he instantaneously follows up the dazzling flash with a pealing explosion that stuns, prostrates and crushes the stoutest opponent."

Not less did the Roman orators consult the laws of euphonic sequence or metrical convenience, and arrange their words in such a succession of articulate sounds as would fall most pleasingly on the ear. The wonderful effects which sometimes attended their elocution were, in all probability, chiefly owing to their exquisite choice of words and their skill in musical concords. It was by the charm of numbers, as well as by the strength of reason, that Cicero confounded Catiline and silenced the eloquent Hortensius. It was this that deprived Curio of all power of recollection when he rose to oppose that great master of enchanting rhetoric; it was this that made even Cæsar himself tremble, and at last change his determined purpose, and acquit the man he had resolved to condemn. When the Roman orator, Carbo, pronounced, on a certain occasion, the sentence, "*Patris dictum sapiens temeritas filii comprobavit*," it was astonishing, says Cicero, to observe the general applause which followed that harmonious close. Doubtless we are ignorant of the art of pronouncing that period with its genuine emphasis; but Cicero assures us that had the final measure,— what is technically called a *dichoree*,— been changed, and the words placed in a different order, their whole effect would have been absolutely destroyed. With the same exquisite sensibility to numbers, an ancient writer says that a similar result would follow, if, in reading the first line of the Æneid,

"Arma virumque cano, Trojae qui primus ab oris."

instead of *primus* we were to pronounce it *primis* (*is* being long, and *us* short).

It is this cunning choice, along with the skilful arrangement of words, that, even more than the thought, eternizes the name of an author. Style is, and ever has been, the most vital element of literary immortalities. More than any other quality it is a writer's own property; and no one, not time itself, can rob him of it, or even diminish its value. Facts may be forgotten, learning grow commonplace, startling truths dwindle into mere truisms; but a grand or beautiful style can never lose its freshness or its charm. For his gorgeous style, even more than for his colossal erudition, is Gibbon admired; it is "the ordered march of his lordly prose" that is the secret of Macaulay's charm; and it is the unstudied grace of Hume's periods which renders him, in spite of his imperfect learning, in spite of his wilful perversions of truth, in spite of his infidelity and his toryism, the popular historian of England.

It has been truly said by a brilliant New England writer that this mystery of style,—why it is, that when one man writes a fact, it is cold or commonplace, and when another man writes it, in a little different, but equivalent phraseology, it is a rifle-shot or a revelation,—has never been sounded. "One can understand a little how the wink or twinkle of an eye, how an attitude, how a gesture, how a cadence or impassioned sweep of voice, should make a boundless distance between truths stated or declaimed. But how words, locked up in forms, still and stiff in sentences, contrive to tip a wink, how a proposition will insinuate more scepticism than it states, how a paragraph will drip with the honey of love, how a phrase will trail

an infinite suggestion, how a page can be so serene or so gusty, so gorgeous or so pallid, so sultry or so cool, as to lap you in one intellectual climate or its opposite,—who has fathomed yet this wonder?"

From all this it will be seen how absurd it is to suppose that one can adequately enjoy the masterpieces of literature by means of translations. Among the arguments against the study of the dead languages, none is more pertinaciously urged by the educational red republicans of the day than this,—that the study is useless, because all the great works, the masterpieces of antiquity, have been translated. The man, we are told, who cannot enjoy Carlyle's version of Wilhelm Meister, Melmoth's Cicero, Morris's Virgil, Martin's Horace, or Carter's Epictetus, must be either a prodigious scholar or a prodigious dunce. Sometimes, it is urged, a translator even improves upon the original, as did Coleridge, in the opinion of many, upon Schiller's "Wallenstein." All this seems plausible enough, but the Greek and Latin scholar knows it to be fallacious and false. He knows that the finest passages in an author,—the exquisite thoughts, the curious verbal felicities,—are precisely those which defy reproduction in another tongue. The most masterly translations of them are no more like the original than a walking-stick is like a tree in full bloom. The quintessence of a writer,—the life and spirit,—all that is idiomatic, peculiar, or characteristic,—all that is Homerian in Homer, or Horatian in Horace,—evaporates in a translation.

It is true that, judging by dictionaries only, almost every word in one language has equivalents in every other; but a critical study of language shows that, with

the exception of terms denoting sensible objects and acts, there is rarely a precise coincidence in meaning between any two words in different tongues. Compare any two languages, and you will find that there are, as the mathematicians would say, many incommensurable quantities, many words in each untranslatable into the other, and that it is often impossible, by a paraphrase, to supply an equivalent. To use De Quincey's happy image from the language of eclipses, the correspondence between the disk of the original word and its translated representative, is, in thousands of instances, not *annular;* the centres do not coincide; the words overlap. Even words denoting sensible objects are not always exact equivalents in any two languages. It might be supposed that a *berg* (the German for mountain or hill) was a *berg* all the world over, and that a word signifying this tangible object in one language must be the absolute equivalent of the word expressing it in another. Yet, as a late German writer* has said, this is far from being the case. The English "mountain," for instance, refers to something bigger than the German *berg.* On the other hand, "hill," which has the next lower signification, in its many meanings is far too diminutive for the German term, which finds no exact rendering in any English vocable.

A comparison of the best English versions of the New Testament with the original, strikingly shows the inadequacy of the happiest translations. Even in the Revised Version, upon which an enormous amount of labor was expended by the best scholars in England and the United States, many niceties of expression which mark the original fail to appear. Owing to the poverty of our tongue

*Karl Hildebrand.

compared with the Greek, which, it has been said, can draw a clear line where other languages can only make a blot, the translators have been compelled to use the same English word for different Greek ones, and thus obliterate many fine distinctions which are essential to the meaning. Thus, as one of the Revisers has shown, it is impossible to exhibit in English the delicate shades of difference in meaning which appear in the Greek between the two verbs both rendered "love,"* in John xxi, 15–17. "The word first employed by Christ is a very common one in the New Testament, and specially denotes a pure, spiritual affection. It is used of God's love to man, as in John iii, 16—'God so *loved* the world,' etc.— and of man's love to God, as in Matt. xxii, 37—'Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God,' etc. The other word more particularly implies that warmth of feeling which exists between friends. Thus, it is used respecting Lazarus in John xi, 3: 'Behold, he whom thou *lovest* is sick;' and again, in John xx, 2, of St. John himself, when he is spoken of as 'the disciple whom Jesus *loved*.' Now, the use of the one word at first by Christ serves to remind St. Peter of the claim which his Divine Master had upon his deep, reverential love. But the Apostle, now profoundly sensible of his own weakness, does not venture to promise this, yet, feeling his whole heart flowing out to Christ, he makes use of the other word, and assures the Saviour at least of a fervent personal affection. Christ then repeats His question, still using the same verb, and Peter replies as before. But on asking the question for the third time, Christ graciously adopts the term employed by the Apostle: He speaks to him again as a friend; He clasps the now happy disciple afresh to

* ἀγαπάω and φιλέω.

His own loving heart."* Now all this is lost through the comparative meagreness of our language. To what extent the subtle distinctions of the Greek original are and must be lost in the translation, may be guessed from the fact that there are no fewer than ten Greek words which have been rendered "appoint" in the ordinary version, no fewer than fourteen which stand for "give," and no fewer than twenty-one which correspond to "depart."

Above all does poetry defy translation. It is too subtle an essence to be poured from one vessel into another without loss. Of Cicero's elegant and copious rhetoric, of the sententious wisdom of Tacitus, of the keen philosophic penetration and masterly narrative talent of Thucydides, of the thunderous eloquence of Demosthenes, and even of Martial's jokes, it may be possible to give some inkling through an English medium; but of the beauties and splendors of the Greek and Latin poets,—never. As soon will another Homer appear on earth, as a translator echo the marvellous music of his lyre. *Imitations* of the "Iliad," more or less accurate, may be given, or *another* poem may be substituted in its place; but a perfect transfusion into English is impossible. For, as Goethe somewhere says, Art depends on Form, and you cannot preserve the form in *altering* the form. Language is a strangely suggestive medium, and it is through the reflex and vague operation of words upon the mind that the translator finds himself baffled. Words, as Cowper said of books, "are not seldom talismans and spells." They have, especially in poetry, a potency of association, a kind of necromantic power, aside from their significance as repre-

* "Companion to the Revised Version of the English New Testament," by Alexander Roberts, D.D.

sentative signs. Over and above their meanings as given in the dictionary, they connote all the feeling which has gathered round them by their employment for hundreds of years. There are in every language certain magical words, which, though they can be translated into other tongues, yet are hallowed by older memories, or awaken tenderer and more delightful associations, than the corresponding words in those tongues. Such words in English are *gentleman*, *comfort*, and *home*, about each of which cluster a multitude of associations which are not suggested by any foreign words by which they can be rendered. There is in poetry a mingling of sound and sense, a delicacy of shades of meaning, and a power of awakening associations, to which the instinct of the poet is the key, and which cannot be passed into a foreign language if the *meaning* be also preserved. You may as easily make lace ruffles out of hemp. Language, it cannot be too often repeated, is not the dress of thought; it is its living expression, and controls both the physiognomy and the organization of the idea it utters.

How many abortive attempts have been made to translate the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" into English verse! What havoc have even Pope and Cowper made of some of the grandest passages in the old bard! The former, it has been well said, turned his lines into a series of brilliant epigrams, sparkling and cold as the "Heroic Epistles" of Ovid; the other chilled the warmth and toned down the colors of Homer into a sober, drab-tinted hue, through which gods and men loom feebly, and the camp of the Achæans, the synod of the Trojans, and the deities in council, have much of the air of a Quaker meeting-house. Regarded as an English poem, Pope's translation of the "Iliad" is

unquestionably a brilliant and exquisitely versified production; but viewed as a transfusion of the old bard into another language, it is but a *caput mortuum*, containing but little more of Homer than the names and events. The fervid and romantic tone, the patriarchal simplicity, the mythologic coloring, the unspeakable audacity and freshness of the images,—all that breathes of an earlier world, and of the sunny shores, and laughing waves, and blue sky, of the old Ægean,—all this, as a critic has observed, "is vanished and obliterated, as is the very swell and fall of the versification, regular in its very irregularity, like the roll of the ocean. Instead of the burning, picture-like words of the old Greek, we have the dainty diction of a literary artist; instead of the ever varied, resounding swell of the hexameter, the neat, elegant, nicely balanced modern couplet. In short, the old bard is stripped of his flowing chlamys and his fillets, and is imprisoned in the high-heeled shoes, the laced velvet coat, and flowing periwig of the eighteenth century." Chapman, who has more of the spirit of Homer, occasionally catches a note or two from the Ionian trumpet; but presently blows so discordant a blast that it would have grated on the ear of Stentor himself. Lord Derby and William C. Bryant have been more successful in many respects than Pope or Cowper; but each has gained some advantages by compensating defects.

Did Dryden succeed better when he put the "Æneid" into verse? Did he give us that for which Virgil toiled during eleven long years? Did he give us the embodiment of those vulgar impressions which, when the old Latin was read, made the Roman soldier shiver in all his manly limbs? All persons who are familiar with English literature know what havoc Dryden made of "Paradise

Lost," when he attempted, even in the same language, to put it into rhyme,—a proposal to do which drew from Milton the contemptuous remark: "Ay, young man; you can tag my rhymes." A man of genius never made a more signal failure. He could not draw the bow of Ulysses. His rhyming, rhetorical manner, splendid and powerful as it confessedly is, proved an utterly inadequate vehicle for the high argument of the great Puritan. So with his modernizations of Chaucer. His reproductions of "the first finder of our faire language" contain much admirable verse; but it is not Chaucer's. They are simply elaborate paraphrases, in which the idiomatic colors and forms, the distinctive beauties of the old poet,—above all, the simplicity and sly grace of his language, the exquisite tone of *naïveté*, which, like the lispings of infancy, give such a charm to his verse,—utterly vanish. Dryden failed, not from lack of genius, but simply because failure was inevitable,—because this aroma of antiquity, in the process of transfusion into modern language, is sure to evaporate.

All such changes involve a loss of some subtle trait of expression, or some complexional peculiarity, essential to the truthful exhibition of the original. The outline, the story, the bones remain; but the soul is gone,—the essence, the ethereal light, the perfume is vanished. As well might a painter hope, by using a different kind of tint, to give the expression of one of Raphael's or Titian's masterpieces, as any man expect, by any other words than those which a great poet has used, to convey the same meaning. Even the humblest writer has an idiosyncrasy, a manner of his own, without which the identity and truth of his work are lost. If, then, the meaning and spirit of

a poem cannot be transferred from one place to another, so to speak, under the roof of a common language, must it not *a fortiori* be impossible to transport them faithfully across the barriers which divide one language from another, and antiquity from modern times?

How many ineffectual attempts have been made to translate Horace into English and French! It is easy to give the right meaning, or something like the meaning, of his lyrics; but they are cast in a mould of such exquisite delicacy that their ease and elegance defy imitation. All experience shows that the *traduttore* must necessarily be *traditore*,—the translator, a traducer of the Sabine bard. As well might you put a violet into a crucible, and expect to reproduce its beauty and perfume, as expect to reproduce in another tongue the mysterious synthesis of sound and sense, of meaning and suggested association, which constitutes the vital beauty of a lyric. The special imagination of the poet, it has been well said, is an imagination inseparably bound up with language; possessed by the infinite beauty and the deepest, subtlest meanings of words; skilled in their finest sympathies; powerful to make them yield a meaning which another never could have extracted from them. It is of the very essence of the poet's art, so that, in the highest exercise of that art, there is no such thing as the rendering of an idea in appropriate language; but the conception, and the words in which it is conveyed, are a simultaneous creation, and the idea springs forth full-grown, in its panoply of radiant utterance.

The works of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, exist in the words as the mind in conjunction with the body. Separation is death. Alter the melody

ever so skilfully, and you change the effect. You cannot translate a sound; you cannot give an elegant version of a melody. Prose, indeed, suffers less from paraphrase than poetry; but even in translating a prose work, unless one containing facts or reasoning merely, the most skilful linguist can be sure of hardly more than of transferring the raw material of the original sentiment into his own tongue. The bullion may be there, but its shape is altered; the flower is preserved, but the aroma is gone; there, to be sure, is the arras, with its Gobelin figures, but it is the wrong side out. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is as much contrast between the best translation and the original of a great author, as between a wintry landscape, with its dead grass and withered foliage, and the same landscape arrayed in the green robes of summer. Nay, we prefer the humblest original painting to a feeble copy of a great picture,— a barely "good" original book to any lifeless translation. A living dog is better than a dead lion; for the external attributes of the latter are nothing without the spirit that makes them terrible.

The difficulty of translating from a dead language, of whose onomatopœia we are ignorant, will appear still more clearly, when we consider what gross and ludicrous blunders are made in translating even from one living language into another. Few English-speaking persons can understand the audacity of Racine, so highly applauded by the French, in introducing the words *chien* and *sel* into poetry; "dog" and "salt" may be used by us without danger; but, on the other hand, we may not talk of "entrails" in the way the French do. Every one has heard of the Frenchman, who translated the majestic exclamation of

Milton's Satan, "Hail! horrors, hail!" by "*Comment vous portez-vous, Messieurs les Horreurs, comment vous portez-vous?*" "How do you do, horrors, how do you do?" Another Frenchman, in reproducing the following passage from Shakespeare in his own tongue,

> "Even such a man, so faint, so spiritless,
> So dull, so dead in look, *so woe-begone*,"

translated the italicized words thus: "So, grief, be off with you!" In the opera of "Macbetto," the term "hell-broth" in the witches' scene is rendered in Italian *polto inferno*. Hardly less ridiculous is the blunder made by a translator of Alexander Smith's "Life-Drama," who metamorphoses the expression, "clothes me with kingdoms," into "*me fait un vêtement de royaumes*,"—"makes me a garment of kingdoms." Even so careful a writer as Lord Mahon, in his "History of the War of the Succession in Spain," translates the French word *abbé* by "abbot." One of the chief difficulties in translating into a foreign language is that, though every word the translator uses may be authorized by the best writers, yet the combination of his terms may be unidiomatic. Thus the words *arène* and *rive* are both to be found in the best French writers; yet if a foreigner, not familiar with the niceties of that language, should write

> "Sur la rive du fleuve amassant de l'arène,"

he would be laughed at, not only by the critics, but by the most illiterate workmen in Paris. The French idiom will not admit of the expression *sur la rive du fleuve*, correct though each word may be taken singly, but requires the phrase *sur le bord de la rivière*, as it does *amasser du sable*, and not *amasser de l'arène*. What can be more expressive than one of the lines in which Milton

describes the lost angels crowding into Pandemonium, where, he says, the air was

"*Brushed* with the *hiss* of *rustling* wings,"

a line which it is impossible to translate into words that will convey precisely the same emotions and suggestions that are roused by a perusal of the original? Suppose the translator to hit so near to the original as to write

"Stirred with the noise of quivering wings,"

will not the line affect you altogether differently? Let one translate into another language the following line of Shakespeare,

"The learned *pate ducks* to the golden fool,"

and is it at all likely that the quaint, comic effect of the words we have italicized would be reproduced?

The inadequacy of translations will be more strikingly exemplified by comparing the following lines of Shakespeare with such a version as we might expect in another language:

"How sweet the moonlight *sleeps* upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony."

A foreign translator, says Leigh Hunt, would dilute and take all taste and freshness out of this draught of poetry, after some such fashion as the following:

"With what a charm the moon serene and bright
Lends on the bank its soft reflected light!
Sit we, I pray, and let us sweetly hear
The strains melodious, with a raptured ear;
For soft retreats, and night's impressive hour,
To harmony impart divinest power."

In view of all these considerations what can be more untrue than the statement so often made, that to be capable of easy translation is a test of the excellence of

a composition? This doctrine, it has been well observed, goes upon the assumption that one language is just like another language,—that every language has all the ideas, turns of thought, delicacies of expression, figures, associations, abstractions, points of view which every other language has. "Now, as far as regards Science, it is true that all languages are pretty much alike for the purposes of Science; but even in this respect some are more suitable than others, which have to coin words or to borrow them, in order to express scientific ideas. But if languages are not all equally adapted even to furnish symbols for those universal and eternal truths in which Science consists, how can they be reasonably expected to be all equally rich, equally forcible, equally musical, equally exact, equally happy, in expressing the idiosyncratic peculiarities of thought of some original and fertile mind, who has availed himself of one of them? * * *

"It seems that a really great author must admit of translation, and that we have a test of his excellence when he reads to advantage in a foreign language as well as in his own. Then Shakespeare *is* a genius because he can be translated into German, and not a genius because he cannot be translated into French. The multiplication table is the most gifted of all conceivable compositions, because it loses nothing by translation, and can hardly be said to belong to any one language whatever. Whereas I should rather have conceived that, in proportion as ideas are novel and recondite, they would be difficult to put into words, and that the very fact of their having insinuated themselves into one language would diminish the chance of that happy accident being repeated in another. In the language of savages you can hardly express any idea or

act of the intellect at all. Is the tongue of the Hottentot or Esquimau to be made the measure of the genius of Plato, Pindar, Tacitus, St. Jerome, Dante, or Cervantes?" *

The truth is, music written for one instrument cannot be played upon another. To the most cunning writer that ever tried to translate the beauties of an author into a foreign tongue, we may say in the language of a French critic: "You are that ignorant musician who plays his part exactly, not skipping a single note, nor neglecting a rest,—only what is written in the key of *fa*, he plays in the key of *sol*. Faithful translator!"

When we think of the marvellous moral influence which words have exercised in all ages, we cannot wonder that the ancients believed there was a subtle sorcery in them, "a certain bewitchery or fascination," indicating that language is of mystic origin. The Jews, believing that God had revealed a full-grown language to mankind, attached a divine character to language, and supposed that there was a natural and necessary connection between words and things. The name of a person was not a mere conventional sign, but an essential attribute, an integral part of the person himself. Hence we find in Genesis no less than fifty derivations of names, in almost all of which the derivation connects the name, prophetically or otherwise, with some event in the person's life. Hence, also, the practice, under certain conditions, of changing men's names, as illustrated in the histories of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joshua and others. "Call me not Naomi (pleasant), but Mara (bitter)," said the broken-hearted widow of Elimelech. "Even in the New Testament we find our Lord Himself in

* "University Sermons," by J. H. Newman.

a solemn moment fixing on the mind of His greatest apostle a new and solemn significance given to the name he bore. 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my church.' St. Paul also, is probably playing upon a name when, in Phil. iv, 3, he affectionately addresses a friend as *γνήσιε Σύζυγε*, 'true yoke fellow,' since it is an ancient and very probable supposition that Syzygus or Yokefellow is there a proper name." The Gothic nations supposed that even their mysterious alphabetical characters, called "Runes," possessed magical powers; that they could stop a sailing vessel or a flying arrow,—that they could excite love or hate, or even raise the dead. The Greeks believed that there was a necessary, mysterious connection between words and the objects they signified, so that man unconsciously expressed, in the words whereby he named things or persons, their innermost being and future destiny, as though in a symbol incomprehensible to himself. The accidental good omen in the name of an envoy who was called Hegesistratos, or "leader of an army," decided a Greek general to assist the Samians, and led to the battle of Mycale. The Romans, in their levies, took care to enrol first names of good omen, such as Victor, Valerius, Salvius, Felix, and Faustus. Cæsar gave a command in Spain to an obscure Scipio, merely for the omen which his name involved. When an expedition had been planned under the leadership of Atrius Niger, the soldiers absolutely refused to proceed under a commander of so ill omened a name,—*dux abominandi nominis*,—it being, as De Quincey says, "a pleonasm of darkness." The same deep conviction that words are powers is seen in the *favete linguis* and *bona verba quæso* of the Romans, by which they endeavored to repress the utterance of any

word suggestive of ill fortune, lest the event so suggested to the imagination should actually occur. So they were careful to avoid, by euphemisms, the utterance of any word directly expressive of death or other calamity, saying *vixit* instead of *mortuus est*, and "be the event fortunate or otherwise," instead of "adverse." The name Egesta they changed into Segesta, Maleventum into Beneventum, Axeinos into Euxine, and Epidamnus into Dyrrhachium, to escape the perils of a word suggestive of *damnum*, or detriment. Even in later times the same feeling has prevailed,—an illustration of which we have in the life of Pope Adrian VI, who, when elected, dared not retain his own name, as he wished, because he was told by his cardinals that every Pope who had done so had died in the first year of his reign.*

That there is a secret instinct which leads even the most illiterate peoples to recognize the potency of words, is illustrated by the use made of names in the East, in "the black art." In the Island of Java, a fearful influence, it is said, attaches to names, and it is believed that demons, invoked in the name of a living individual, can be made to appear. One of the magic arts practised there is to write a man's name on a skull, a bone, a shroud, a bier, an image made of paste, and then put it in a place where two roads meet, when a fearful enchantment, it is believed, will be wrought against the person whose name is so inscribed.

But we need not go to antiquity or to barbarous nations to learn the mystic power of words. There is not a day,

*We have heard of an Englishman's deploring with the deepest pathos his having been named "James," asserting that it had to some extent made a flunkey of his very soul, against his will.

hardly an hour of our lives, which does not furnish examples of their ominous force. Mr. Maurice says with truth, that "a light flashes out of a word sometimes which frightens one. It is a common word; one wonders how one has dared to use it so frequently and so carelessly, when there were such meanings hidden in it." Shakespeare makes one of his characters say of another, "She speaks poniards, and every word stabs"; and there are, indeed, words which are sharper than drawn swords, which give more pain than a score of blows; and, again, there are words by which pain of soul is relieved, hidden grief removed, sympathy conveyed, counsel imparted, and courage infused. How often has a word of recognition to the struggling confirmed a sublime yet undecided purpose, — a word of sympathy opened a new vista to the desolate, that let in a prospect of heaven, — a word of truth fired a man of action to do a deed which has saved a nation or a cause, — or a genius to write words which have gone ringing down the ages!

"I have known a word more gentle
  Than the breath of summer air;
In a listening heart it nestled,
  And it lived forever there.
Not the beating of its prison
  Stirred it ever, night or day;
Only with the heart's last throbbing
  Could it ever fade away."

A late writer has truly said that "there may be phrases which shall be palaces to dwell in, treasure-houses to explore; a single word may be a window from which one may perceive all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Oftentimes a word shall speak what accumulated volumes have labored in vain to utter; there may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence."

"Nothing," says Hawthorne, "is more unaccountable than the spell that often lurks in a spoken word. A thought may be present to the mind so distinctly that no utterance could make it more so; and two minds may be conscious of the same thought, in which one or both take the profoundest interest; but as long as it remains unspoken, their familiar talk flows quietly over the hidden idea, as a rivulet may sparkle and dimple over something sunken in its bed. But speak the word, and it is like bringing up a drowned body out of the deepest pool of the rivulet, which has been aware of the horrible secret all along, in spite of its smiling surface."

The significance of words is illustrated by nothing, perhaps, more strikingly than by the fact that unity of speech is essential to the unity of a people. Community of language is a stronger bond than identity of religion, government, or interests; and nations of one speech, though separated by broad oceans, and by creeds yet more widely divorced, are one in culture, one in feeling. Prof. Marsh has well observed that the fine patriotic effusion of Arndt, "*Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?*" was founded upon the idea that the oneness of the *Deutsche Zunge*, the German speech, implied a oneness of spirit, of aims, and of duties; and the universal acceptance with which the song was received showed that the poet had struck a chord to which every Teutonic heart responded. When a nation is conquered by another, which would hold it in subjection, it has to be again conquered, especially if its character is essentially opposed to that of its conqueror, and the second conquest is often the more difficult of the two. To kill it effectually, its nationality must be killed, and this can be done only by killing its language; for it

is through its language that its national prejudices, its loves and hates, and passions live. When this is not done, the old language, slowly dying out,—if, indeed, it dies at all,—has time to convey the national traditions into the new language, thus perpetuating the enmities that keep the two nations asunder. We see this illustrated in the Irish language, which, with all the ideas and feelings of which that language is the representative and the vehicle, has been permitted by the English government to die a lingering death of seven or eight centuries. The coexistence of two languages in a state is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall it. The settlement of townships and counties in our country by distinct bodies of foreigners is, therefore, a great evil; and a daily newspaper, with an Irish, German, or French prefix, or in a foreign language, is a perpetual breeder of national animosities, and an effectual bar to the Americanization of our foreign population.

The languages of conquered peoples, like the serfs of the middle ages, appear to be *glebæ adscriptitiæ*, and to extirpate them, except by extirpating the native race itself, is an almost impossible task. Rome, though she conquered Greece, could not plant her language there. The barbarians who overran the Roman Empire adopted the languages of their new subjects; the Avars and Slaves who settled in Greece became Hellenized in language; the Northmen in France adopted a Romanic tongue; and the Germans in France and northern Italy, as well as the Goths in Spain, conformed to the speech of the tribes they had vanquished. It is asserted, on not very good authority, that William the Conqueror fatigued his ear and exhausted his patience, during the first years of his

sovereignty, in trying to learn the Saxon language; but, failing, ordered the Saxons to speak Norman-French. He might as well have ordered his new subjects to walk on their heads. Charles the Fifth, in all the plenitude of his power, could not have compelled all his subjects, Dutch, Flemish, German, Italian, Spanish, etc., to learn his language; he had to learn theirs, though a score in number, as had Charlemagne before him.

England has maintained her dominion in the East for more than a hundred and fifty years, yet the mass of Hindoos know no more of her language than of the Greek. In the last century, Joseph II, of Austria, issued an edict that all his subjects, German, Slavonic, or Magyar, should speak and write one language,—German; but the people recked his decree as little as did the sea that of Canute. Many of the provinces broke out into open rebellion; and the project was finally abandoned. The Venetians were for a long period under the Austrian yoke; but they spoke as pure Italian as did any of their independent countrymen, and they never detested their rulers more heartily than at the time of their deliverance. The strongest bond of union between the different States of this country is not the wisdom of our constitution, nor the geographical unity of our territory, but the one common language that is spoken throughout the Republic, from the great lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Were different tongues spoken in the different sections of the realm, no wisdom of political structure or sagacity of political administration could hold so many States together amidst such diversities of culture and social customs, and interests so conflicting. But our unity of speech,—the common language in which we

express our thoughts and feelings, making all friendly and commercial correspondence easy, giving us a common literature, and enabling us to read the same books, newspapers, printed lectures and speeches,— this is like a soul animating all the limbs of the Republic, giving it a firmer unity than its geological skeleton or its political muscles could possibly ensure. Were the languages of our country as various as those of Europe, who does not see that the task of allaying the bitter feeling of hostility at the South, which led to the late outbreak, and of fusing the citizens of the North and of the South into one homogeneous people, would be almost hopeless?

As a corollary from all that has been said, it is plain that nothing tends more to make a man just toward other nations than the exploration through their languages of their peculiar thought-world. He who masters the speech of a foreign people will gain therefrom a profound knowledge of their modes of thought and feeling, more accurate in some respects than he could gain by personal intercourse with them. He will feel the pulse of their national life in their dictionary, and will detect in their phraseology many a noble and manly impulse, of which, while blinded by national prejudice, he had never dreamed.

A volume might be filled with illustrations of the power of words; but, great as is their power, and though, when nicely chosen, they have an intrinsic force, it is, after all, the *man* who makes them potent. As it was not the famous needle gun, destructive as it is, which won the late Prussian victories, but the intelligence and discipline of the Prussian soldier,— the man *behind* the gun, educated in the best common schools in the world,— so it is the latent heat of character, the man behind the words, that gives

them momentum and projectile force. The same words, coming from one person, are as the idle wind that kisses the cheeks; coming from another, they are the cannon shot that pierces the target in the bull's-eye. The thing said is the same in each case; the enormous difference lies in the man who says it. The man fills out, crowds his words with meaning, and sends them out to do a giant's work; or he makes them void and nugatory, impotent to reach their destination, or to do any execution should they hit the mark. The weight and value of opinions and sentiments depend oftentimes less upon their intrinsic worth than upon the degree in which they have been organized into the nature of the person who utters them; their force, less upon their inherent power than upon the latent heat stored away in their formation, which is liberated in their publication.

There is in character a force which is felt as deeply, and which is as irresistible, as the mightiest physical force, and which makes the plainest expressions of some men like consuming fire. Their words, instead of being the barren signs of abstract ideas, are the media through which the life of one mind is radiated into other minds. They inspire, as well as inform; electrify, as well as enlighten. Even truisms from their lips have the effect of original perceptions; and old saws and proverbs, worn to shreds by constant repetition, startle the ear like brilliant fancies. Some of the greatest effects recorded in the history of eloquence have been produced by words which, when read, strike us as tame and commonplace. The tradition that Whitefield could thrill an audience by saying "Mesopotamia!" probably only burlesques an actual fact.

Grattan said of the eloquence of Charles James Fox that

"every sentence came rolling like a wave of the Atlantic, three thousand miles long." Willis says that every word of Webster weighs a pound. College sophomores, newly fledged lawyers, and representatives from Bunkumville, often display more fluency than the New Hampshire giant; but his words are to theirs as the roll of thunder to the patter of rain. What makes his argument so ponderous and destructive to his opponents, is not its own weight alone, but in a great degree the added weight of his temper and constitution, the trip-hammer *momentum* with which he makes it fall upon the theory he means to crush. Even the vast mass of the man helped, too, to make his words impressive. "He carried men's minds, and overwhelmingly pressed his thought upon them, with the immense current of his physical energy." When the great champion of New England said, in the United States Senate, "There are Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill, and there they will remain forever," it was the weight of character, and of all the associations connected with it, which changed that which, uttered by another, would have been the merest truism, into a lofty and memorable sentiment. The majesty of the utterance, which is said to have quickened the pulse even of "the great Nullifier," Calhoun, is due to the fact that it came from a mighty nature, which had weighed and felt all the meaning which those three spots represent in the stormy history of the world. It was this which gave such prodigious power to the words of Chatham, and made them smite his adversaries like an electric battery. It was the haughty assumption of superiority, the scowl of his imperial brow, the ominous growl of his voice, "like thunder heard remote," the impending lightnings which seemed ready to dart from his eyes, and,

above all, the evidence which these furnished of an imperious and overwhelming will, that abashed the proudest peers in the House of Lords, and made his words perform the office of stabs and blows. The same words, issuing from other lips, would have been as harmless as popguns.

In reading the quotations from Chalmers, which are reported to have so overwhelmingly oppressed those who heard them, almost every one is disappointed. It is the creative individuality projected into the words that makes the entire difference between Kean or Kemble and the poorest stroller that murders Shakespeare. It is said that Macready never produced a more thrilling effect than by the simple words, "*Who said that?*" An acute American writer observes that when Sir Edward Coke, a man essentially commonplace in his intellect and prejudices, though of vast acquirement and giant force of character, calls Sir Walter Raleigh "a spider of hell," the metaphor may not seem remarkable; but it has a terrible significance when we see the whole roused might of Sir Edward Coke glaring through it.* What can be more effective than the speech of Thersites in the first book of the "Iliad"? Yet the only effect was to bring down upon the speaker's shoulders the staff of Ulysses. Pope well observes that, had Ulysses made the same speech, the troops would have sailed for Greece that very night. The world considers not merely what is said, but *who* speaks, and *whence* he says it.

> "Let but a lord once own the happy lines,
> How the wit brightens, how the style refines!"

says the same poet of a servile race; and another poet

* "Literature and Life," by Edwin P. Whipple.

says of a preacher who illustrated his doctrine by his life, that

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway."

Euripides expresses the same belief in the efficacy of position and character, when he makes Hecuba entreat Ulysses to intercede for her; "for the arguments," says she, "which are uttered by men of repute, are very different in strength from those uttered by men unknown."

The significance of the simplest epithet depends upon the character of the man that uses it. Let two men of different education, tastes, and habits of thought, utter the word "grand," and our sense of the word is modified according to our knowledge of the men. The conceptions represented by the words a man uses, it is evident, are different from every other man's; and into this difference enter all his individuality of character, the depth or the shallowness of his knowledge, the quality of his education, the strength or feebleness of his feelings, everything that distinguishes him from another man.

Mr. Whipple says truly that "there are no more simple words than 'green,' 'sweetness,' and 'rest,' yet what depth and intensity of significance shine in Chaucer's 'green'; what a still ecstasy of religious bliss irradiates 'sweetness,' as it drops from the pen of Jonathan Edwards; what celestial repose beams from 'rest' as it lies on the page of Barrow! The moods seem to transcend the resources of language; yet they are expressed in common words, transfigured, sanctified, imparadised by the spiritual vitality which streams through them." The same critic, in speaking of style as the measure of a writer's power, observes that "the marvel of Shakespeare's diction is its immense suggestiveness,—his power of radiating through new verbal

combinations, or through single expressions, a life and meaning which they do not retain in their removal to dictionaries. When the thought is so subtle, or the emotion so evanescent, or the imagination so remote, that it cannot be flashed upon the 'inward eye,' it is hinted to the inward ear by some exquisite variation of tone. An American essayist on Shakespeare, Mr. Emerson, in speaking of the impossibility of acting or reciting his plays, refers to this magical suggestiveness in a sentence almost as remarkable as the thing it describes. 'The recitation,' he says, 'begins; one golden word leaps out immortal from all this painted pedantry, *and sweetly torments us with invitations to its own inaccessible homes!*' He who has not felt this witchery in Shakespeare's style has never read him. He may have looked *at* the words, but has never looked *into* them."

The fact that words are never taken absolutely,—that they are expressions, not simply of thoughts or feelings, but of natures,—that they are media for the emission and transpiration of character,—is one that cannot be too deeply pondered by young speakers and writers. Fluent young men who wonder that the words which they utter with such glibness and emphasis have so little weight with their hearers, should ask themselves whether their characters are such as to give weight to their words. As in engineering it is a rule that a cannon should be at least one hundred times heavier than its shot, so a man's character should be a hundred times heavier than what he says. When a La Place or a Humboldt talks of the "universe," the word has quite another meaning than when it is used by plain John Smith, whose ideas have never extended beyond the town of Hull. So, when a

man's friend gives him religious advice, and talks of "the solemn responsibilities of life," it makes a vast difference in the weight of the words whether they come from one who has been tried and proved in the world's fiery furnace, and whose whole life has been a trip-hammer to drive home what he says, or from a callow youth who prates of that which he feels not, and testifies to things which are not realities to his own consciousness. There is a hollow ring in the words of the cleverest man who talks of "trials and tribulations" which he has never felt. "Words," says the learned Selden, "must be fitted to a man's mouth. 'Twas well said by the fellow that was to make a speech for my lord mayor, that he desired first to take measure of his lordship's mouth."

Few things are more interesting in the study of a language, than to note how much it gains by time and culture. In its vocabulary, its forms, and its euphonic and other changes, it embodies the mental growth and modifications of thousands of minds. It enriches itself with all the intellectual spoils of the people that use it, and with the lapse of years is gradually deepened, mellowed, and refined. The language of an old and highly civilized people differs from that of its infancy, as much as a broad and majestic river, bearing upon its bosom the commerce of the world, differs from the tiny streamlet in which it had its origin. And yet it is no less true that, as Max Müller has observed, since the beginning of the world no new addition has ever been made to the substantial elements of speech, any more than to the substantial elements of nature. There is a constant change in language, a coming and going of words; but no man can ever invent an entirely new word. Before a novel term can be intro-

duced into use, there must be some connection with a former term,—a bridge to enable the mind to pass over to the new word. Equally true is it that when a vocable has dropped out of the language,—has become dead or obsolete,—it is almost as impossible to call it back to life as it is to restore to life a deceased human being. Pope, it is true, speaks of commanding "old words that have long slept to wake;" and Horace declares that many words will be born again that have seemingly dropped into their graves. But it is certain that, as Prof. Craik says, "very little revivification has ever taken place in human speech," and that one may more easily introduce into a language a dozen new words than restore to general use an old one that has been discarded. It is true that when Thomson published his "Castle of Indolence," he prefixed to the poem a list of so-called obsolete words, of which not a few, as "carol," "glee," "imp," "appall," "blazon," "sere," are in good standing to-day. It is true, also, that in the first quarter of this century Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Scott, and other poets, enriched their vocabularies with words taken from the more archaic and obsolescent element of the language, and that we have in use many words that were more or less neglected during the eighteenth century. But in nearly all these cases it is probable that the vocables thus recalled to a living and working condition, were never actually dead, but only in a state of suspended animation.

It has been calculated that our English language, including the nomenclature of the arts and sciences, contains one hundred thousand words; yet of this immense number it is surprising how few are in common use. It is a common opinion that every Englishman and American

speaks English, every German German, and every Frenchman French. The truth is, that each person speaks only that limited portion of the language with which he is acquainted. To the great majority even of educated men, three-fourths of these words are almost as unfamiliar as Greek or Choctaw. Strike from the lexicon all the obsolete or obsolescent words; all the words of special arts or professions; all the words confined in their usage to particular localities; all the words of recent coinage which have not yet been naturalized; all the words which even the educated speaker uses only in homœopathic doses,—and it is astonishing into what a manageable volume your plethoric Webster or Worcester will have shrunk. It has been calculated that a child uses only about one hundred words; and, unless he belongs to the educated classes, he will never employ more than three or four hundred. A distinguished American scholar estimates that few speakers or writers use as many as ten thousand words; ordinary persons, of fair intelligence, not over three or four thousand. Even the great orator, who is able to bring into the field, in the war of words, half the vast array of light and heavy troops which the vocabulary affords, yet contents himself with a far less imposing display of verbal force. Even the all-knowing Milton, whose wealth of words seems amazing, and whom Dr. Johnson charges with using a "Babylonish dialect," uses only eight thousand; and Shakespeare himself, "the myriad-minded," only fifteen thousand. Each word, however, has a variety of meanings, with more or fewer of which every man is familiar, so that his knowledge of the language, which has practically over a million of words, is far greater than it appears. Still the facts we have stated show that the diffi-

culty of mastering the vocabulary of a new tongue is greatly overrated; and they show, too, how absurd is the boast of every new dictionary-maker that *his* vocabulary contains so many thousand words more than those of his predecessors. This may, or may not, be a merit; but it is certain that there is scarcely a page of Johnson that does not contain some word — obsolete, un-English, or purely scientific — that has no business there; while Webster and Worcester cram them in by hundreds and thousands at a time; each doing his best to load and deform his pages, and all the while triumphantly challenging the world to observe how prodigious an advantage he has gained over his rivals.

We are accustomed to go to the dictionary for the meaning of words; but it is *life* that discloses to us their significance in all the vivid realities of experience. It is the actual world, with its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and pains, that reveals to us their joyous or terrible meanings — meanings not to be found in Worcester or Webster. Does the young and light-hearted maiden know the meaning of "sorrow," or the youth just entering on a business career understand the significance of the words "failure" and "protest"? Go to the hod carrier, climbing the many-storied building under a July sun, for the meaning of "toil"; and, for a definition of "overwork," go to the pale seamstress who

> "In midnight's chill and murk
> Stitches her life into her work;
> Bending backwards from her toil,
> Lest her tears the silk might soil;
> Shaping from her bitter thought
> Heart's-ease and forget-me-not;
> Satirizing her despair
> With the emblems woven there!"

Ask the hoary-headed debauchee, bankrupt in purse, friends, and reputation,— with disease racking every limb,— for the definition of "remorse"; and go to the bedside of the invalid for the proper understanding of "health." Life, with its inner experience, reveals to us the tremendous force of words, and writes upon our hearts the ineffaceable records of their meanings. Man is a dictionary, and human experience the great lexicographer. Hundreds of human beings pass from their cradles to their graves who know not the force of the commonest terms; while to others their terrible significance comes home like an electric flash, and sends a thrill to the innermost fibres of their being.

To conclude,— it is one of the marvels of language, that out of the twenty plain elementary sounds of which the human voice is capable, have been formed all the articulate voices which, for six thousand or more years, have sufficed to express all the sentiments of the human race. Few as are these sounds, it has been calculated that one thousand million writers, in one thousand million years, could not write out all the combinations of the twenty-four letters of the alphabet, if each writer were daily to write out forty pages of them, and if each page should contain different orders of the twenty-four letters. Another remarkable fact is that the vocal organs are so constructed as to be exactly adapted to the properties of the atmosphere which conveys their sounds, while at the same time the organs of hearing are fitted to receive with pleasure the sounds conveyed. Who can estimate the misery that man would experience were his sense of hearing so acute that the faintest whisper would

give him pain, loud talking or laughter stun him, and a peal of thunder strike him deaf or dead?

"If Nature thunder'd in his opening ears,
And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres,
How would he wish that Heaven had left him still
The whispering zephyr and the purling rill!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MORALITY IN WORDS.

Genus dicendi imitatur publicos mores. . . Non potest alius esse ingenio, alius animo color.—SENECA.

The world is satisfied with words; few care to dive beneath the surface.—PASCAL.

Words are the signs and symbols of things; and as in accounts, ciphers and symbols pass for real sums, so, in the course of human affairs, words and names pass for things themselves.—ROBERT SOUTH.

Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil.—ISAIAH v, 20.

THE fact that a man's language is a part of his character,—that the words he uses are an index to his mind and heart,—must have been noted long before language was made a subject of investigation. "Discourse," says Quintilian, "reveals character, and discloses the secret disposition and temper; and not without reason did the Greeks teach that as a man lived so would he speak." *Profert enim mores plerumque oratio, et animi secreta detegit. Nec sine causa Græci prodiderunt, ut vivat, quemque etiam dicere.* When a clock is foul and disordered, its wheels warped or cogs broken, the bell hammer and the hands will proclaim the fact; instead of being a guide, it will mislead, and, while the disorder continues, will continually betray its own infirmity. So when a man's mind is disordered or his heart corrupted, there will gather on his face and in his language an expression corresponding to the irregularities within. There is, indeed, a physiognomy in the speech as well as in the face. As physicians judge of the state of the

body, so may we judge of the mind, by the tongue. Except under peculiar circumstances, where prudence, shame, or delicacy seals the mouth, the objects dearest to the heart,— the pet words, phrases, or shibboleths, the terms expressing our strongest appetencies and antipathies,— will rise most frequently to the lips; and Ben Jonson, therefore, did not exaggerate in saying that no glass renders a man's form and likeness so true as his speech. "As a man speaks, so he thinks; and as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

If a man is clear-headed, noble-minded, sincere, just, and pure in thought and feeling, these qualities will be symbolized in his words; and, on the other hand, if he has a confused habit of thought, is mean, grovelling and hypocritical, these characteristics will reveal themselves in his speech. The door keeper of an alien household said to Peter, "Thou art surely a Galilean; thy speech bewrayeth thee"; and so, in spite of all masks and professions, in spite of his reputation, the essential nature of every person will stamp itself on his language. How often do the words and tones of a professedly religious man, who gives liberally to the church, prays long and loud in public, and attends rigidly to every outward observance, betray in some mysterious way,— by some impalpable element which we instinctively detect, but cannot point out to others,— the utter worldliness of his character! How frequently do words uttered volubly, and with a pleasing elocution, affect us as mere sounds, suggesting only the hollowness and unreality of the speaker's character! How often does the use of a single word flash more light upon a man's motives and principles of action, give a deeper insight into his habits of thought and feeling, than an entire biography! How often, when a secret sorrow preys upon the heart,

which we would fain hide from the world by a smiling face, do we betray it unconsciously by a trivial or parenthetical word! Fast locked do we deem our Bluebeard chamber to be, the key and the secret of which we have in our own possession; yet all the time a crimson stream is flowing across the door sill, telling of murdered hopes within.

Out of the immense magazine of words furnished by our English vocabulary,—embracing over a hundred thousand distinct terms,—each man selects his own favorite expressions, his own forms of syntax, by a peculiar law which is part of the essential difference between him and all other men; and in the verbal stock in trade of each individual we should find, could it once be laid open to us, a key that would unlock many of the deepest mysteries of his humanity,—many of the profoundest secrets of his private history. How often is a man's character revealed by the adjectives he uses! Like the inscriptions on a thermometer, these words of themselves reveal the temperament. The conscientious man weighs his words as in a hair-balance; the boaster and the enthusiast employ extreme phrases, as if there were no degree but the superlative. The cautious man uses words as the rifleman does bullets; he utters but few words, but they go to the mark like a gunshot, and then he is silent again, as if he were reloading. The dogmatist is known by his sweeping, emphatic language, and the absence of all qualifying terms, such as "perhaps" and "it may be." The fact that the word "glory" predominates in all of Bonaparte's dispatches, while in those of his great adversary, Wellington, which fill twelve enormous volumes, it never once occurs — not even after the hardest won victory,— but "duty," "duty," is invariably named as

the motive for every action, speaks volumes touching their respective characters. It was to work out the problem of self-aggrandizement that Napoleon devoted all his colossal powers; and *conscience*, *responsibility*, and kindred terms, seem never to have found their way into his vocabulary. Men, with their physical and moral force, their bodily energies, and their passions, prejudices, delusions, and enthusiasms, were to him but as fuel to swell the blaze on the altar of that ambition of which he was at once the priest and deity. Of duties to them he never for a moment dreamed; for, from the hot May-day of Lodi to the autumnal night of Moscow, when he fled the flaming Kremlin, he seemed unconscious that he was himself a created and responsible being.

An author's style is an open window through which we can look in upon him, and estimate his character. The cunning reader reads between the lines, and finds out secrets about the writer, as if he were overhearing his soliloquies. He marks the pet phrase or epithet, draws conclusions from asseveration and emphasis, notes the half-perceptible sneer or insinuation, detects the secret misery that is veiled by a jest, and learns the writer's idiosyncrasies even when he tries hardest to mask them. We know a passage from Sir Thomas Browne, as we know a Rembrandt or a Durer. Macaulay is betrayed by his antitheses, and Cicero by his *esse videatur*.

Dr. Arnold has strikingly shown how we may judge of a historian by his style, his language being an infallible index to his character. "If it is very heavy and cumbrous, it indicates either a dull man or a pompous man, or at least a slow and awkward man; if it be tawdry and full of commonplaces enunciated with great solemnity, the

writer is most likely a silly man; if it be highly antithetical and full of unusual expressions, or artificial ways of stating a plain thing, the writer is clearly an affected man. If it be plain and simple, always clear, but never eloquent, the writer may be a very sensible man, but is too hard and dry to be a very great man. If, on the other hand, it is always elegant, rich in illustrations, and without the relief of simple and great passages, we must admire the writer's genius in a very high degree, but we may fear that he is too continually excited to have attained to the highest wisdom, for that is necessarily calm. In this manner the mere language of a historian will furnish us with something of a key to his mind, and will tell us, or at least give us cause to presume, in what his main strength lies, and in what he is deficient." It has been said of Gibbon's style that it was one in which it was impossible to speak the truth.

A writer in the "Edinburgh Review" observes that the statement that a man's language is part of his character, holds true, not only in regard to the usage of certain shibboleths of a party, whether in religion or politics, but also in regard to a general vocabulary. "There is a school vocabulary and a college vocabulary; certain phrases brought home to astound and perplex the uninitiated, and passing now and then into general currency. In this age of examinations,—army, navy, civil-service, and middle-class,—the verb 'to pluck' is well-nigh incorporated with the vernacular, and must take its place in dictionaries. The sportsman Nimrod has his esoteric vocabulary, and so has likewise the angler Walton. The man of the world has his own set of phrases, understood and recognized by the fraternity; and so has the gourmand; and so also has the

fancier of wines, who, in opposition to one of the laws of nature, speaks to you of wine, a fluid, as being 'dry.' The connoisseur in painting tells you also of 'dryness' in a picture, and he uses other terms which seem as if they had been invented to puzzle the uninitiated. Your favorite landscape may have 'tones' in it, as well as your violin. With shoulders that are 'broad,' and with cloth that is 'broad' covering those broad shoulders, you stand and observe that a painting is 'broad.' You sit down at dinner with a 'delicious bit' of venison before you on the table, and looking up see a 'delicious bit' of Watteau or Wouvermans before you on the wall."

As with individuals, so with nations: the language of a people is often a moral barometer, which marks with marvellous precision the rise or fall of the national life. The stock of words composing any language corresponds to the knowledge of the community that speaks it, and shows with what objects it is familiar, what generalizations it has made, what distinctions it has drawn,—all its cognitions and reasonings, in the worlds of matter and of mind. "As our material condition varies, as our ways of life, our institutions, public and private, become other than they have been, all is necessarily reflected in our language. In these days of railroads, steamboats and telegraphs, of sun pictures, of chemistry and geology, of improved wearing stuffs, furniture, styles of building, articles of food and luxury of every description, how many words and phrases are in every one's mouth which would be utterly unintelligible to the most learned man of a century ago, were he to rise from his grave and walk our streets! . . . Language is expanded and contracted in precise adaptation to the circumstances and needs of those

who use it; it is enriched or impoverished, in every part, along with the enrichment or impoverishment of their minds."* Every race has its own organic growth, its own characteristic ideas and opinions, which are impressed on its political constitution, its legislation, its manners and its customs, its modes of religious worship; and the expression of all these peculiarities is found in its speech. If a people is, as Milton said of the English, a noble and a puissant nation, of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent and subtle to discourse, its language will exhibit all these qualities; while, on the other hand, if it is frivolous and low-thoughted,—if it is morally bankrupt and dead to all lofty sentiments,—its mockery of virtue, its inability to comprehend the true dignity and meaning of life, the feebleness of its moral indignation, will all inevitably betray themselves in its speech, as truly as would the opposite qualities of spirituality of thought and exaltation of soul. These discreditable qualities will find an utterance "in the use of solemn and earnest words in senses comparatively trivial or even ridiculous; in the squandering of such as ought to have been reserved for the highest mysteries of the spiritual life, on slight and secular objects; and in the employment, almost in jest and play, of words implying the deepest moral guilt."

Could anything be more significant of the profound degradation of a people than the abject character of the complimentary and social dialect of the Italians, and the pompous appellations with which they dignify things in themselves insignificant, as well as their constant use of intensives and superlatives on the most trivial occasions?

* "Language and the Study of Language," by W. D. Whitney.

Is it not a notable fact that they, who for so long a time had no country,— on whose altars the fires of patriotism have, till of late, burned so feebly,— use the word *pellegrino*, "foreign," as a synonym for "excellent"? Might we not almost infer *a priori* the servile condition to which, previous to their late uprising, centuries of tyranny had reduced them, from the fact that with the same people, so many of whom are clothed in rags, a man of honor is "a well dressed man"; that a man who murders in secret is "a brave man," *bravo;* that a *virtuoso*, or "virtuous man," is one who is accomplished in music, painting, and sculpture,— arts which should be the mere embroidery, and not the web and woof, of a nation's life; that, in their magnificent indigence, they call a cottage with three or four acres of land *un podere*, "a power"; that they term every house with a large door *un palazzo*, "a palace," a lamb's fry *una cosa stupenda*, "a stupendous thing," and that a message sent by a footman to his tailor through a scullion is *una ambasciata*, "an embassy"?

Let us not, however, infer the *hopeless* depravity of any people from the baseness of the tongue they have inherited, not chosen. It makes a vast difference, as Prof. Marsh justly observes, whether words expressive of noble thoughts and mighty truths do not exist in a language, or whether ages of soul-crushing tyranny have compelled their disuse, and the employment of the baser part of the national vocabulary. The mighty events that have lately taken place in Italy "show that a tone of hypocrisy may cling to the tongue, long after the spirit of a nation is emancipated, and that where grand words are found in a speech, there grand thoughts, noble purposes, high resolves exist also; or, at least, the spark slumbers which

a favoring breath may, at any moment, kindle into a cherishing and devouring flame." *

A late writer calls attention to the fact that the French language, while it has such positive expressions as "drunk" and "tipsy," conveyed by *ivre* and *gris*, contains no such negative term as "sober." *Sobre* means always "temperate" or "abstemious," never the opposite condition to intoxication. The English, it is argued, drink enough to need a special illustrative title for a man who has not drunk; but though the Parisians began to drink alcohol freely during the sieges, the French have never yet felt the necessity of forming any such curious subjective appellation, consequently they do not possess it. Again, the French boast that they have no such word as "bribe," as if this implied their exemption from that sin; and such, indeed, may be the fact. But may not the absence of this word from their vocabulary prove, on the contrary, their lack of sensibility to the heinous nature of the offense, just as the lack of the word "humility," in the language of the Greeks, usually so rich in terms, proves that they lacked the thing itself, or as the fact that the same people had no word corresponding to the Latin *ineptus*, argues, as Cicero thought, not that the character designated by the word was wanting among them, but that the fault was so universal with them that they failed to recognize it as such? Is it not a great defect in a language that it lacks the words by which certain forms of baseness or sinfulness, in those who speak it, may be brought home to their consciousness? Can we properly hate or abhor any wicked act till we have given it a specific objective existence by giving it a name which shall at once desig-

* "Lectures on the English Language."

nate and condemn it? The *pot-de-vin*, and other jesting phrases which the French have coined to denote bribery, can have no effect but to encourage this wrong.

What shall we think of the fact that the French language has no word equivalent to "listener"? Is it not a noteworthy circumstance, shedding light upon national character, that among thirty-seven millions of talkers, no provision, except the awkward paraphrase, *celui qui écoute*, "he who hears," should have been made for hearers? Is there any other explanation of this blank than the supposition that every Frenchman talks from the pure love of talking, and not to be heard; that, reversing the proverb, he believes that silence is silver, but talking is golden; and that, not caring whether he is listened to or not, he has never recognized that he has no name for the person to whom he chatters? Again, is it not remarkable that, among the French, *bonhomme*, "a good man," is a term of contempt; that the fearful Hebrew word, "gehenna," has been condensed into *gêne*, and means only a petty annoyance; and that *honnêteté*, which once meant honesty, now means only civility? It was in the latter half of the reign of Louis XIV that the word *honnête* exchanged its primitive for its present meaning. Till then, according to good authority, when a man's descent was said to be *honnête*, he was complimented on the virtuousness of his progenitors, not reminded of the mediocrity of their condition; and when the same term was applied to his family, it was an acknowledgment that they belonged to the middle ranks of society, not a suggestion that they were plebeians. Again, how significant is the fact that the French has no such words as "home," "comfort," "spiritual," and but one word for "love" and

"like," compelling them to put Heaven's last gift to man on a par with an article of diet; as "I love Julia,"—"I love a leg of mutton"! Couple with these peculiarities of the language the circumstance that the French term *spirituel* means simply witty, with a certain quickness, delicacy, and versatility of mind, and have you not a real insight into the national character?

It is said that the word oftenest on a Frenchman's lips is *la gloire*, and next to that, perhaps, is *brillant*, "brilliant." The utility of a feat or achievement in literature or science, in war or politics, surgery or mechanics, is of little moment in his eyes unless it also dazzles and excites surprise. It is said that Sir Astley Cooper, the great British surgeon, on visiting the French capital, was asked by the surgeon *en chef* of the empire how many times he had performed some feat of surgery that required a rare union of dexterity and nerve. He replied that he had performed the operation thirteen times. "Ah! but, Monsieur, I have performed him one hundred and sixty time. How many time did you save his life?" continued the curious Frenchman, as he saw the blank amazement of Sir Astley's face. "I," said the Englishman, "saved eleven out of the thirteen. How many did *you* save out of a hundred and sixty?" "Ah! Monsieur, I lose dem all;—but de operation was very *brillant!*"

The author of "Pickwick" tells us that in America the sign vocal for starting a coach, steamer, railway train, etc., is "Go Ahead!" while with John Bull the ritual form is "All Right!"—and he adds that these two expressions are somewhat expressive of the respective moods of the two nations. The two phrases are, indeed, vivid miniatures of John Bull and his restless brother, who sits on the

safety valve that he may travel faster, pours oil and rosin into his steam furnaces, leaps from the cars before they have entered the station, and who would hardly object to being fired off from a cannon or in a bombshell, provided there were one chance in fifty of getting sooner to the end of his journey. Let us hope that the day may yet come when our "two-forty" people will exchange a little of their fiery activity for a bit of Bull's caution, and when our Yankee Herald's College, if we ever have one, may declare "All Right!" to be the motto of our political escutcheon, with as much propriety as it might now inscribe "Go Ahead!" beneath that fast fowl, the annexing and screaming eagle, that hovers over the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, dips its wings in two oceans, and has one eye on Cuba and the other on Quebec.

A volume might be filled with illustrations of the truth that the language of nations is a mirror, in which may be seen reflected with unerring accuracy all the elements of their intellectual as well as of their moral character. What scholar that is familiar with Greek and Latin has failed to remark how indelibly the contrariety of character in the two most civilized nations of antiquity is impressed on their languages, distinguished as is the one by exuberant originality, the other by innate poverty of thought? In the Greek, that most flexible and perfect of all the European tongues, — which surpasses every other alike in its metaphysical subtlety, its wealth of inflections, and its capacity for rendering the minutest and most delicate shades of meaning,— the thought controls and shapes the language; while the tyrannous objectivity of the Latin, rigid and almost cruel, like the nation whose voice it is, and whose words are always *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stet pro*

ratione voluntas, coerces rather than simply syllables the thought. "Greek," says Henry Nelson Coleridge, "the shrine of the genius of the old world; as universal as our race, as individual as ourselves; of infinite flexibility, of indefatigable strength; with the complication and distinctness of nature herself; to which nothing was vulgar, from which nothing was excluded; speaking to the ear like Italian, speaking to the mind like English; at once the variety and picturesqueness of Homer, the gloom and intensity of Æschylus; not compressed to the closest by Thucydides, not fathomed to the bottom by Plato, not sounding with all its thunders, nor lit up with all its ardors under the Promethean touch of Demosthenes himself. And Latin, — the voice of Empire and of Law, of War and of the State, — the best language for the measured research of History, and the indignant declamation of moral satire; rigid in its constructions, parsimonious in its synonyms; yet majestic in its bareness, impressive in its conciseness; the true language of history, instinct with the spirit of nations, and not with the passions of individuals; breathing the maxims of the world, and not the tenets of the schools; one and uniform in its air and spirit, whether touched by the stern and haughty Sallust, by the open and discursive Livy, by the reserved and thoughtful Tacitus."

It is a noteworthy fact that, as the Romans were the most majestic of nations, so theirs is the only ancient language that contains the word "majesty," the Greek having nothing that exactly corresponds to it; and the Latin language is as majestic as were the Romans themselves. Cicero, or some other Latin writer, finds an argument to show that the intellectual character of the Romans was

higher than that of the Greeks, in the fact that the word *convivium* means "a living together," while the corresponding Greek term, *συμπόσιον*, means "a drinking together." While the Romans retained their early simplicity and nobility of soul, their language was full of power and truth; but when they became luxurious, sensual, and corrupt, their words degenerated into miserable and meaningless counters, without intrinsic value, and serving only as a conventional medium of exchange. It has been said truly that "in the pedantry of Statius, in the puerility of Martial, in the conceits of Seneca, in the poets who would go into emulous raptures on the beauty of a lap-dog and the apotheosis of a eunuch's hair, we read the hand-writing of an empire's condemnation."

The climate of a country, as well as the mind and character of its people, is clearly revealed in its speech. The air men breathe, the temperature in which they live, and the natural scenery amid which they pass their lives, acting incessantly upon body and mind, and especially upon the organs of speech, impart to them a soft or a harsh expression. The languages of the South, as we should expect them to be, "are limpid, euphonic, and harmonious, as though they had received an impress from the transparency of their heaven, and the soft sweet sounds of the winds that sigh among the woods. On the other hand, in the hirrients and gutturals, the burr and roughness of the Northern tongues, we catch an echo of the breakers bursting on their crags, and the crashing of the pine branch over the cataract." The idiom of Sybaris cannot be that of Sparta. The Attic Greek was softer than the Doric, the dialect of the mountains; the Ionic, spoken in the voluptuous regions of Asia Minor, was softer and

more sinuous than the Attic. The Anglo-Saxon, the language of a people conversant chiefly with gloomy forests and stormy seas, and prone to silence, was naturally harsh and monosyllabic. The roving sea-king of Scandinavia, cradled on the ocean and rocked by its storms, could no more speak in the soft and melting accents of a Southern tongue than the screaming eagle could utter the liquid melody of a nightingale's song.

It is said that in the South Sea Islands version of the New Testament there are whole chapters with no words ending in consonants, except the proper names of the original. Italian has been called the love-talk of the Roman without his armor. Fuller, contrasting the Italians and the Swiss, quaintly remarks that the former, "whose country is called 'the country of good words,' love the circuits of courtesy, that an ambassador should not, as a sparrow hawk, fly outright to his prey, and meddle presently with the matter in hand; but, like the noble falcon, mount in language, soar high, fetch compasses of compliment, and then in due time stoop to game, and seize on the business propounded. Clean contrary, the Switzers (who sent word to the king of France not to send them an ambassador with stores of words, but a treasurer with plenty of money) count all words quite out which are not straight on, have an antipathy against eloquent language, the flowers of rhetoric being as offensive to them as sweet perfume to such as are troubled with the mother; yea, generally, great soldiers have their stomachs sharp set to feed on the matter; loathing long speeches, as wherein they conceive themselves to lose time, in which they could conquer half a country; and, counting bluntness their best eloquence, love to be accosted in their own kind."

It is in the idioms of a people, its peculiar turns of expression, and the modifications of meaning which its borrowed words have undergone, that its distinctive genius is most strikingly seen. The forms of salutation used by different nations are saturated with their idiosyncrasies, and of themselves alone essentially reveal their respective characters. How clearly is the innermost distinction between the Greek mind and the Hebrew brought out in their respective salutations, "Rejoice!" and "Peace!" How vividly are contrasted, in the two salutations, the sunny, world-enjoying temper of the one people with the profound religious feeling of the other! The formula of the robust, energetic, valiant Roman,— with whom virtue was manliness, and whose value was measured by his *valor*,— was *Salve! Vale!* that is, "Be well," "Be strong." In the expression, "If God will it, you are well," is betrayed the fatalism of the Arab; while the greeting of the Turk, "May your shadow never be less!" speaks of a sunny clime. In the hot, oppressive climate of Egypt perspiration is essential to health, and you are asked, "How do you perspire?" The Italian asks, *Come sta?* literally, "How does he stand?" an expression originally referring to the *standing* of the Lombard merchants in the market place, and which seems to indicate that one's well-being or health depends on his business prosperity. Some writers, however, have regarded the word "stand" in this formula as meaning no more than "exist"; mere life itself, in the land of *far niente*, being a blessing. The Genoese, a trading people, and at one time the bankers of Europe, used in former days to say, *Sanita e guadagno*, or "Health and gain!" a phrase in which the ideals of the countrymen of Columbus are tersely summed up. The

dreamy, meditative German, dwelling amid smoke and abstractions, salutes you with the vague, impersonal, metaphysical *Wie gehts?*—"How goes it?" Another salutation which he uses is, *Wie befinden sie sich?*—"How do you find yourself?" A born philosopher, he is so absent-minded, so lost in thought and clouds of tobacco smoke, that he thinks you cannot tell him of the state of your health till you have searched for and *found* it.

The trading Hollander, who scours the world, asks, *Hoe vaart's-ge?* "How do you go?" an expression eminently characteristic of a trading, travelling people, devoted to business, and devoid of sentiment. The thoughtful Swede inquires, "How do you think?" They also inquire, *Hur mär ni?*—literally "How can you?" that is, "Are you strong?" The lively, restless, vivacious Frenchman, who lives in other people's eyes, and is more anxious about appearances than about realities, —who has never to hunt himself up like the German, and desires less to do, like the Anglo-Saxon, than to be lively, to show himself,—says frankly, *Comment vous portez-vous?*—"How do you carry yourself?" In these few words we have the pith and essence, the very soul, of the French character. Externals, the shapes and shows of things,—for what else could we expect a people to be solicitous, who are born actors, and who live, to a great extent, for stage effect; who unite so much outward refinement with so much inward coarseness; who have an exquisite taste for the ornamental, and an almost savage ignorance of the comfortable; who invented, as Emerson says, the dickey, but left it to the English to add the shirt? It has been said that a man would be owl-blind, who in the "Hoo's a' wi' ye" of the kindly

Scot, could not perceive the mixture of national pawkiness with hospitable cordiality. "One sees, in the mind's eye, the canny chield, who would invite you to dinner three days in the week, but who would look twice at your bill before he discounted it." What can be more unmistakably characteristic than the Irish peasant's "Long life to your honor; may you make your bed in glory!" After such a grandiose salute, we need no mouser among the records of antiquity to certify to us that the Hibernian is of Oriental origin, nor do we need any other key to his peculiar vivacity and impressionableness of feeling, his rollicking, daredevil, hyperbole-loving enthusiasm. Finally, of all the national forms of salutation, the most signally characteristic,— the one which reveals the very core, the inmost "heart of heart" of a people,— is the Englishman's "How do you do?" In these four little monosyllables the activity, the intense practicality of the Englishman, the very quintessence of his character, are revealed as by a lightning's flash. To do! Not to think, to stand, to carry yourself, but to *do;* and this doing is so universal among the English,— its necessity is so completely recognized,— that no one dreams of asking whether you are doing, or what you are doing, but all demand, "*How* do you do?"

It has been well observed by the learned German writer, J. D. Michaelis, that "some virtues are more sedulously cultivated by moralists, when the language has fit names for indicating them; whereas they are but superficially treated of, or rather neglected, in nations where such virtues have not so much as a name. Languages may obviously do injury to morals and religion by their equivocation; by false accessories, inseparable from

the principal idea; and by their poverty." It is a striking fact, noted by an English traveller, that the native language of Van Dieman's Land has four words to express the idea of taking life, not one of which indicates the deep-lying distinction between to kill and to murder; while any word for love is wanting to it altogether. One of the most formidable obstacles which Christian missionaries have encountered in teaching the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel to the heathen, has been the absence from their languages of a spiritual and ethical nomenclature. It is in vain that the religious teachers of a people present to them a doctrinal or ethical system inculcating virtues and addressed to faculties, whose very existence their language, and consequently the conscious self-knowledge of the people, do not recognize. Equally vain is it to reprehend vices which have no name by which they can be described and denounced, as things to be loathed and shunned. Hence, in translating the Bible into the languages of savage nations, the translators have been compelled to employ merely provisional phrases, until they could develop a dialect fitted to convey moral as well as intellectual truth. It is said that the Ethiopians, having but one word for "person" and "nature," could not apprehend the doctrine of the union of Christ's two natures in one single person. There are languages of considerable cultivation in which it is not easy to find a term for the Supreme Being. Seneca wrote a treatise on "Providence," which had not even a name at Rome in the time of Cicero. It is a curious fact that the English language, rich as it is in words to express the most complex religious ideas, as well as in terms characterizing vices and crimes, had until about

two centuries ago no word for "selfishness," the root of all vices, nor any single word for "suicide." The Greeks and Romans had a clear conception of a moral ideal, but the Christian idea of "sin" was utterly unknown to the Pagan mind. Vice they regarded as simply a relaxed energy of the will, by which it yielded to the allurements of sensual pleasure; and *vir*tue, literally "manliness," was the determined spirit, the courage and vigor with which it resisted such temptations. But the idea of "holiness" and the antithetic idea of sin were such utter strangers to the Pagan mind that it would have been impossible to express them in either of the classical tongues of antiquity. As De Maistre has strikingly observed, man knew well that he could "irritate" God or "a god," but not that he could "offend" him. The words "crime" and "criminal" belong to all languages: those of "sin" and "sinner" belong only to the Christian tongue. For a similar reason, man could always call God "Father," which expresses only a relation of creation and of power; but no man, of his own strength, could say "my Father"! for this is a relation of love, foreign even to Mount Sinai, and which belongs only to Calvary.

Again, the Greek language, as we have already seen, had no term for the Christian virtue of "humility"; and when the apostle Paul coined one for it, he had to employ a root conveying the idea, not of self-abasement before a just and holy God, but of positive debasement and meanness of spirit. On the other hand, there is a word in our own tongue which, as De Quincey observes, cannot be rendered adequately either by German or Greek, the two richest of human languages, and without which we should all be disarmed for one great case, continually

recurrent, of social enormity. It is the word "humbug." "A vast mass of villany, that cannot otherwise be reached by legal penalties, or brought within the rhetoric of scorn, would go at large with absolute impunity, were it not through the stern Rhadamanthian aid of this virtuous and inexorable word."

There is no way in which men so often become the victims of error as by an imperfect understanding of certain words which are artfully used by their superiors. Cynicism is seldom shallower than when it sneers at what it contemptuously calls the power of words over the popular imagination. If men are agreed about things, what, it is asked, can be more foolish than to dispute about names? But while it is true that in the physical world things dominate over names, and are not at the mercy of a shifting vocabulary, yet in the world of ideas,—of history, philosophy, ethics and poetry,—words triumph over things, are even equivalent to things, and are as truly the living organism of thought as the eyes, lips, and entire physiognomy of a man, are the media of the soul's expression. Hence words are the only certain *test* of thought; so much so that we often stop in the midst of an assertion, an exclamation, or a request, startled by the form it assumes in words. Thus, in Shakespeare, King John says to Hubert, who pleaded his sovereign's order for putting the young prince to death, that if, instead of receiving the order in signs,

> "Thou
> Hadst bid me tell my tale *in express words*,
> Deep shame had struck me dumb."

Words are often not only the vehicle of thought, but the very mirror in which we see our ideas, and behold the beauty or ugliness of our inner selves.

A volume might be written on the mutual influence of language and opinion, showing that as

> "Faults in the life breed errors in the brain,
> And these reciprocally those again,"

so the sentiments we cherish mould our language, and our words react upon our opinions and feelings. Let a man go into a foreign country, give up his own language, and adopt another, and he will gradually and unconsciously change his opinions, too. He will neither be able to express his old ideas adequately in the new words, nor to prevent the new words of themselves putting new ideas in his brain. Who has failed to notice that the opinion we entertain of an object does not more powerfully influence the mind in applying to it a name or an epithet, than the epithet or name influences the opinion? Call thunder "the bolt of God's wrath," and you awaken a feeling of terror; call it, with the German peasant, *das liebe gewitter*, "the dear thunder," and you excite a different emotion. As the forms in which we clothe the outward expression of our feelings react with mighty force upon the heart, so our speculative opinions are greatly confirmed or invalidated by the technical terms we employ. Fiery words, it has been truly said, are the hot blast that inflames the fuel of our passionate nature; and formulated doctrine, a hedge that confines the discursive wanderings of the thoughts. In personal quarrels, it is the stimulus men give themselves by stinging words that impels them to violent deeds; and in argumentative discussions it is the positive affirmation and reaffirmation of our views which, more than the reasons we give, deepen our convictions. The words that have helped us to conquer the truth often become the very tyrants of our con-

victions; and phrases once big with meaning are repeated till they "ossify the very organs of intelligence." False or partial definitions often lead into dangerous errors; an impassioned polemic falls a victim to his own logic, and a wily advocate becomes the dupe of his own rhetoric.

Words, in short, are excellent servants, but the most tyrannical of masters. Some men command them, but a vast majority are commanded by them. There are words which have exercised a more iron rule, swayed with a more despotic power, than Cæsar or the Russian Czar. Often an idle word has conquered a host of facts; and a mistaken theory, embalmed in a widely received word, has retarded for centuries the progress of knowledge. Thus the protracted opposition in France to the Newtonian theory arose chiefly from the influence of the word "attraction"; the contemptuous misnomer, "Gothic," applied to northern mediæval architecture, perpetuated the dislike with which it was regarded; and the introduction of the term "landed proprietor" into Bengal caused a disorganization of society which had never been caused by its most barbarous invaders.

Macaulay, in his "History of England," mentions a circumstance strikingly illustrative of the connection between language and opinion, — that no large society of which the language is not Teutonic has ever turned Protestant, and that wherever a language derived from ancient Rome is spoken, the religion of modern Rome to this day prevails. "Men believe," says Bacon, "that their reason is lord over their words, but it happens, too, that words exercise a reciprocal and reactionary power over the intellect. . . Words, as a Tartar's bow, do shoot back upon the understanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle and pervert

the judgment." Not only every language, but every age, has its charmed words, its necromantic terms, which give to the cunning speaker who knows how to ring the changes upon them, instant access to the hearts of men, as at "Open Sesame!" the doors of the cave flung themselves open to the thieves, in the Arabian tale. "There are words," says Balzac, "which, like the trumpets, cymbals and bass drums of mountebanks, attract the public; the words 'beauty,' 'glory,' 'poetry,' have witcheries that seduce the grossest minds." At the utterance of the magic names of Austerlitz and Marengo, thousands have rushed to a forlorn hope, and met death at the cannon's mouth.

When Haydon's picture of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem was exhibited in London in 1820, Mrs. Siddons, the famous actress, entering the exhibition room, said: "The paleness of your Christ gives it a supernatural look." This, says the painter, settled its success. There is great value in the selection of terms; many a man's fortune has been made by a happy phrase. Thousands thronged to see the great work with "a supernatural look."

South, in his eloquent sermons on "The Fatal Imposture and Force of Words," observes that any one who wishes to manage "the rabble," need never inquire, so long as they have ears to hear, whether they have any understanding whereby to judge. With two or three popular, empty words, well tuned and humored, he may whistle them backward and forward, upward and downward, till he is weary; and get upon their backs when he is so. When Cæsar's army mutinied, no argument from interest or reason could persuade them; but upon his addressing them as *Quirites*, the tumult was instantly hushed, and they took that word in payment of all. "In

the thirtieth chapter of Isaiah we find some arrived at that pitch of sottishness, and so much in love with their own ruin, as to own plainly, and roundly say, what they would be at. In the tenth verse, 'Prophesy not unto us,' say they, 'right things, but prophesy to us smooth things.' As if they had said, 'Do but oil the razor for us, and let us alone to cut our own throats.' Such an enchantment is there in words; and so fine a thing does it seem to some to be ruined plausibly, and to be ushered to destruction with panegyric and acclamation; a shameful, though irrefragable argument of the absurd empire and usurpation of words over things; and that the greatest affairs and most important interests of the world are carried on by things, not as they are, but as they are called."

The Romans, after the expulsion of Tarquin, could not brook the idea of being governed by a *king;* yet they submitted to the most abject slavery under an emperor. Cromwell was too sagacious to disgust the republicans by calling himself King, though he doubtless laughed grimly in his sleeve as, under the title of Lord Protector, he exercised all the regal functions. We are told by Saint Simon that at the court of the grand monarch, Louis XIV, gambling was so common that even the ladies took part in it. The gentlemen did not scruple to cheat at cards; but the ladies had a peculiar tenderness on the subject. No lady could for a moment think of retaining such unrighteous gains; the moment they were touched, they were religiously given away. But then, we must add, the gift was always made to some other winner of her own sex. By carefully avoiding the words "interchange of winnings," the charming casuists avoided all self-reproach, and all sharp censure by their discreet and lenient confessors.

There are sects of Christians at the present day that protest vehemently against a hired ministry; yet their preachers must be warmed, fed and clothed by "donation parties"; reminding one of the snob gentleman in Moliere, whose father was no shop-keeper, but kindly "chose goods" for his friends, which he let them have for — money.

Party and sectarian leaders know that the great secret of the art of swaying the people is to invent a good shibboleth or battle cry, to be dinned continually in their ears. Persons familiar with British history will remember certain talismanic vocables, such as "Wilkes and Liberty," the bare utterance of which has been sufficient at times to set a whole population in a flame; while the solemn and sepulchral cadences in which Pitt repeated the cuckoo song of "thrones and altars," "anarchy and dissolution of social order," were more potent arguments against revolution than the most perfect syllogism that was ever constructed in mood and figure. So in our own country this verbal magic has been found more convincing than arguments in "Barbara" or "Baralipton." Patriots and demagogues alike have found that it was only necessary, in South's phrase, to take any passion of the people, when it was predominant and just at the critical height of it, "and nick it with some lucky or unlucky word," and they might "as certainly overrule it to their own purpose as a spark of fire, falling upon gunpowder, will infallibly blow it up." "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights," "No More Compromise," "The Higher Law," "The Irrepressible Conflict," "Squatter Sovereignty," and other similar phrases, have roused and moved the public mind as much as the pulpit and the press.

Gouverneur Morris, in his Parisian journal of 1789,

tells an anecdote which strikingly illustrates this influence of catch-words upon the popular mind. A gentleman, in walking, came near to a knot of people whom a street orator was haranguing on the power of a qualified veto (*veto suspensif*), which the constituent assembly had just granted to the king. "Messieurs," said the orator, "we have not a supply of bread. Let me tell you the reason. It has been but three days since the king obtained this qualified veto, and during that time the aristocrats have bought up some of these *suspensions*, and carried the grain out of the kingdom." To this profound discourse the people assented by loud cheers. Not only shibboleths, but epithets, are often more convincing than syllogisms. The term *Utopian* or *Quixotic*, associated in the minds of the people with any measure, even the wisest and most practicable, is as fatal to it as what some one calls the poisonous sting of the American (?) *humbug*.

So in theology; false doctrines and true doctrines have owed their currency or non-currency, in a great measure, to the coinage of happy terms, by which they have been summed up and made attractive or offensive. Trench observes that "the entire secret of Buddhism is in the 'Nĭrvâna.' Take away the word, and it is not too much to say that the keystone to the whole arch is gone." When the Roman Catholic Church coined the term "transubstantiation," the error which had so long been held in solution was precipitated, and became henceforth a fixed and influential dogma. What a potent watchword was the term "Reformation," in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries! Who can estimate the influence of the phrases "Broad Church," "Liberal Church," "Close Communion," in advancing or retarding the growth of certain religious sects

at this day? Many of even the most "advanced thinkers," who reject the supernatural element of the Bible, put all religions upon the same level, and deem Shakespeare as truly inspired as the Apostles, style themselves "Christians."

Even in science happy names have had much to do with the general reception of truth. "Hardly any original thoughts on mental or social subjects," says a writer, "ever make their way among mankind, or assume their proper proportions even in the minds of their inventors, until aptly selected words or phrases have, as it were, nailed them down and held them fast." How much is the study of the beautiful science of botany hindered by such "lexical superfetations" as *chrysanthemum leukanthemum*, *Myosotis scorpioeides*,—"scorpion-shaped mouse's ear"; and how much is that of astronomy promoted by such popular terms as "the bear," "the serpent," "the milky way"! How much knowledge is gathered up in the compact and easily remembered phrase, "correlation of forces"; and to what an extent the wide diffusion of Darwin's speculations is owing to two or three felicitous and comprehensive terms, such as "the struggle for existence," "survival of the fittest," "the process of natural selection"! Who that has felt the painfulness of doubt has not desired to know something of "the *positive* philosophy" of Comte? On the other hand, the well-known anatomist, Professor Owen, complains with just reason of the embarrassments produced in his science by having to use a long description instead of a name. Thus a particular bone is called by Soemmering "*pars occipitalis stricte sic dicta partis occipitalis ossis*

spheno-occipitalis," a description so clumsy that only the direst necessity would lead one to use it.

Even great authors, who are supposed to have "sovereign sway and masterdom" over words, are often bewitched and led captive by them. Thus Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth were bent on establishing their Pantisocracy on the banks of the Susquehanna, not because they knew anything of that locality, but because Susquehanna was "such a *pretty name*." Again, to point an epigram or give edge to a sarcasm, a writer will stab a rising reputation as with a poniard; and, even when convicted of misrepresentation, will sooner stick to the lie than part with a *jeu d'esprit*, or forego a verbal felicity. Thus Byron, alluding to Keats's death, which was supposed to have been caused by Gifford's savage criticism in the "Quarterly," said:

> "Strange that the soul, that very fiery particle,
> Should let itself be snuffed out by an article!"

Though he was afterward informed of the untruth of these lines, Byron, plethoric as he was with poetic wealth and wit, could not willingly let them die; and so the witticism yet remains to mislead and provoke the laughter of his readers.

Again, there are authors who, to meet the necessities of rhyme, or to give music to a period, will pad out their sentences with meaningless expletives. They employ words as carpenters put false windows into houses; not to let in light upon their meaning, but for symmetry. Or, perhaps, they imagine that a certain degree of distension of the intellectual stomach is required to enable it to act with its full powers,—just as some of the Russian peasantry mix sawdust with the train oil they drink, or as

hay and straw, as well as corn, are given to horses, to supply the necessary bulk. Thus Dr. Johnson, imitating Juvenal, says:

> "Let observation, with extensive view,
> Survey mankind from China to Peru."

This, a lynx-eyed critic contended, was equivalent to saying: "Let observation, with extensive observation, observe mankind extensively." If the Spartans, as we are told, fined a citizen because he used three words where two would have done as well, how would they have punished such prodigality of language?

It is an impressive truth which has often been noticed by moralists, that indulgence in verbal vice speedily leads to corresponding vices in conduct. If a man talk of any mean, sensual, or criminal practice in a familiar or flippant tone, the delicacy of his moral sense is almost sure to be lessened, he loses his horror of the vice, and, when tempted to do the deed, he is far more likely to yield. Many a man, without dreaming of such a result, has thus talked himself into vice, into sensuality, and even into ruin. The apostle James was so impressed with the significance of speech that he regarded it as an unerring sign of character. "If any man offend not in word," he declares, "the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." Again he declares that "the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"; commenting upon which, Rev. F. W. Robertson observes: "The deadliest poisons are those for which no test is known; there are poisons so destructive that a single drop insinuated into the veins produces death in three seconds. . . . In that drop of venom which distils from the sting of the smallest insect, or the spikes of the nettle-leaf,

there is concentrated the quintessence of a poison so subtle that the microscope cannot distinguish it, and yet so virulent that it can inflame the blood, irritate the whole constitution, and convert night and day into restless misery." So, he adds, there are words of calumny and slander, apparently insignificant, yet so venomous and deadly that they not only inflame hearts and fever human existence, but poison human society at the very fountain springs of life. It was said with the deepest feeling of the utterers of such words, by one who had smarted under their sting: "Adders' poison is under their lips."

Who can estimate the amount of misery which has been produced in society by merely idle words, uttered without malice, and by words uttered in jest? A poet, whose name is unknown to us, has vividly painted the effects of such utterances:

"A frivolous word, a sharp retort,
A flash from a passing cloud,
Two hearts are scathed to their inmost core,
Are ashes and dust forevermore;
Two faces turn to the crowd,
Masked by pride with a lifelong lie,
To hide the scars of that agony.

"A frivolous word, a sharp retort,
An arrow at random sped;
It has cut in twain the mystic tie
That had bound two souls in harmony,
Sweet love lies bleeding or dead.
A poisoned shaft, with scarce an aim,
Has done a mischief sad as shame."

How often have thoughtless words set empires ablaze, and kindled furious wars among nations! It was one of the virtues of George Washington that he knew how to be silent. John Adams said he had the most remarkable mouth he had ever seen; for he had the art of controlling his lips One of the rules of conduct to which David

Hume inflexibly adhered, was never to reply to any attack made upon him or his writings. It was creditable to him that he had no anxiety to have "the last word,"—that which in family circles has been pronounced to be "the most dangerous of infernal machines."

It is not, however, in the realm of literature and morals only that the power of words is seen. Who is ignorant of their sway in the world of politics? Is not fluency of speech, in many communities, more than statesmanship? Are not brains, with a little tongue, often far less potent than "tongue with a garnish of brains"? Need any one be told that a talent for speech-making has stood in place of all other acquirements; that it is this which has made judges without law, and diplomatists without French; which has sent to the army brigadiers who knew not a cannon from a mortar, and to the legislature men who could not tell a bank note from a bill of exchange; which, according to Macaulay, made a Foreign Minister of Mr. Pitt, who never opened Vattel, and which was near making a Chancellor of the Exchequer of Mr. Sheridan, who could not work a sum in long division? "To be a man of the world," says Corporal Bunting, a character in one of Bulwer's novels, "you must know all the ins and outs of speech-ifying. It's words that make another man's mare go your road. Augh! that must have been a clever man as invented language. It is a marvel to think how much a man does in the way of cheating, if he only has the gift of the gab; wants a missus,—talks her over; wants your horse,—talks you out of it; wants a place,—talks himself into it. . . Words make even them 'ere authors, poor creatures, in every man's mouth. Augh! sir, take note of the *words*, and the things will take care of themselves."

It is true that "lying words" are not always responsible for the mischief they do; that they often rebel and growl audibly against the service into which they are pressed, and testify against their taskmasters. The latent nature of a man struggles often through his own words, so that even truth itself comes blasted from his lips, and vulgarity, malignity, and littleness of soul, however anxiously cloaked, are betrayed by the very phrases and images of their opposites. "A satanic drop in the blood," it has been said, "makes a clergyman preach diabolism from scriptural texts, and a philanthropist thunder hate from the rostrum of reform."* But though the truth often leaks out through the most hypocritical words, it is yet true that they are successfully employed, as decoy ducks, to deceive, and the dupes who are cheated by them are legion. There are men fond of abstractions, whom words seem to enter and take possession of, as their lords and owners. Blind to every shape but a shadow, deaf to every sound but an echo, they invert the legitimate order, and regard things as the symbols of words, not words as the symbols of things. There is, in short, "a besotting intoxication which this verbal magic, if I may so call it, brings upon the mind of man. . . Words are able to persuade men out of what they find and feel, to reverse the very impressions of sense, and to amuse men with fancies and paradoxes, even in spite of nature and experience."†

All who are familiar with Dickens will recollect the reply of the shrewd Samuel Weller, when asked the meaning of the word monomania: "When a *poor* fellow takes a piece of goods from a shop, it is called theft; but if a

*"Literature and Life," by Edwin P. Whipple.
†South's Sermons.

wealthy lady does the same thing, it is called *monomania*." There is biting satire as well as *naïveté* and dry humor in the reply, and it strikingly shows the moral power of language; how the same act may be made to appear in wholly different lights, according to the phraseology used to describe it. The same character may be made to look as spotless as an angel, or as black as "the sooty spirits that troop under Acheron's flag," through the lubricity of language. "*Timidus*," says Seneca, "*se cautum vocat; sordidus parcum.*" Thousands who would shrink back with disgust or horror from a vice which has an ugly name, are led "first to endure, then pity, then embrace," when men have thrown over it the mantle of an honorable appellation. A singular but most instructive dictionary might be compiled by taking one after another the honorable and the sacred words of a language, and showing for what infamies, basenesses, crimes, or follies, each has been made a pretext. Is there no meaning in the fact that, among the ancient Romans, the same word was employed to designate a crime and a great action, and that a softened expression for "a thief" was "a man of three letters" (f. u. r.)? Does it make no difference in our estimate of the gambler and his profession, whether we call him by the plain, unvarnished Saxon "blackleg," or by the French epithet, "industrious chevalier"? Can any one doubt that in Italy, when poisoning was rifest, the crime was fearfully increased by the fact that, in place of this term, not to be breathed in ears polite, the death of some one was said to be "assisted"? Or can any one doubt the moral effect of a similar perversion of words in France, when a subtle poison, by which impatient heirs delivered themselves from persons who

stood between them and the inheritance they coveted, was called "succession powder"?

Juvenal indignantly denounces the polished Romans for relieving the consciences of rich criminals by softening the names of their crimes; and Thucydides, in a well known passage of his history, tells how the morals of the Greeks of his day were sapped, and how they concealed the national deterioration, by perversions of the customary meanings of words. Unreasoning rashness, he says, passed as "manliness" and *esprit de corps*, and prudent caution for specious cowardice; sobermindedness was a mere "cloak for effeminacy," and general prudence was "inefficient inertness." The Athenians, at one time, were adepts in the art of coining agreeable names for disagreeable things. "Taxes" they called "subscriptions," or "contributions"; the prison was "the house"; the executioner a "public servant"; and a general abolition of debt was "a disburdening ordinance." Devices like these are common to all countries; and in our own, especially, one is startled to see what an amount of ingenuity has been expended in perfecting this "devil's vocabulary," and how successful the press has been in its efforts to transmute acts of wickedness into mere peccadilloes, and to empty words employed in the condemnation of evil, of the depth and earnestness of the moral reprobation they convey.

The use of classical names for vices has done no little harm to the public morals. We may say of these names, what Burke said with doubtful correctness of vices themselves, that "they lose half their deformity by losing all their grossness." If any person is in doubt about the moral quality of an act, let him characterize it in plain Saxon, and he will see it in its true colors.

Some time ago a Wisconsin clergyman, being detected in stealing books from a bookstore, confessed the truth, and added that he left his former home in New Jersey under disgrace for a similar theft. This fact a New York paper noted under the head of "A Peculiar Misfortune." About the same time a clerk in Richmond, Va., being sent to deposit several hundreds of dollars in a bank, ran away with the money to the North. Having been pursued, overtaken, and compelled to return the money, he was spoken of by "the chivalry" as the young man "who had lately *met with an accident*." Is it not an alarming sign of the times, when, in the legislature of one of our largest eastern States, a member declares that he has been asked by another member for his vote, and told that he would get "five hundred *reasons* for giving it"; thus making the highest word in our language, that which signifies divinely given power of discrimination and choice, the synonym of bribery?

Perhaps no honorable term in the language has been more debased than "gentleman." Originally the word meant a man born of a noble family, or *gens*, as the Romans called it; but as such persons were usually possessed of wealth and leisure, they were generally distinguished by greater refinement of manners than the working classes, and a more tasteful dress. As in the course of ages their riches and legal privileges diminished, and the gulf which separated them from the citizens of the trading towns was bridged by the increasing wealth and power of the latter, the term "gentleman" came at last to denote indiscriminately all persons who kept up the state and observed the social forms which had once characterized men of rank. To-day the term has sunk so low that the

acutest lexicographer would be puzzled to tell its meaning. Not only does every person of decent exterior and deportment assume to be a gentleman, but the term is applied to the vilest criminals and the most contemptible miscreants, as well as to the poorest and most illiterate persons in the community.

In aristocratic England the artificial distinctions of society have so far disappeared that even the porter who lounges in his big chair, and condescends to show you out, is the "gentleman in the hall"; Jeames is the "gentleman in uniform"; while the valet is the "gentleman's gentleman." Even a half a century ago, George IV, who was so ignorant that he could hardly spell, and who in heart and soul was a thorough snob, was pronounced, upon the ground of his grand and suave manners, "the first gentleman of Europe." But in the United States the term has been so emptied of its original meaning,—especially in some of the southern states, where society has hardly emerged from a feudal state, and where men who shoot each other in a street fray still babble of being "born gentlemen," and of "dying like gentlemen,"—that most persons will think it is quite time for the abolition of that heartless conventionality, that pretentious cheat and barbarian, the gentleman. Cowper declared, a hundred years ago, in regard to duelling:

"A gentleman
Will not insult me, and no other can."

A southern newspaper stated some years ago that a "gentleman" was praising the town of Woodville, Mississippi, and remarked that "it was the most quiet, peaceable place he ever saw; there was no quarrelling or rowdyism, no fighting about the streets. If a *gentleman* insulted an-

other, he was *quietly shot down*, and there was the last of it." The gentle Isaiah Rynders, who acted as marshal at the time the pirate Hicks was executed in New York, had doubtless similar notions of gentility; for, after conversing a moment with the culprit, he said to the bystanders: "I asked the *gentleman* if he desired to address the audience, but he declined." In a similar spirit Booth, the assassin of Lincoln, when he was surrounded in the barn, where he was shot like a beast, offered to pledge his word "as a *gentleman*," to come out and try to shoot one or two of his captors. When the Duke of Saxe-Weimar visited the United States about fifty years ago, he was asked by a hackman: "Are you the *man* that's going to ride with me; for I am the *gentleman* that's to drive?"

When a young man becomes a reckless spendthrift, how easy it is to gloss over his folly by talking of his "generosity," his "big-heartedness," and "contempt for trifles"; or, if he runs into the opposite vice of miserly meanness, how convenient to dignify it by the terms "economy" and "wise forecast of the future"! Many a man has blown out another's brains in "an affair of honor," who, if accused of murder, would have started back with horror. Many a person stakes his all on a public stock, or sells wheat or corn which he does not possess, in the expectation of a speedy fall, who would be thunderstruck if told that, while considering himself only a shrewd speculator, he is, in everything save decency of appearance, on a par with the haunter of a "hell," and as much a gambler as if he were staking his money on *rouge-et-noir* or *roulette*. Hundreds of officials have been tempted to defraud the government by the fact that the harshest term applied to the offence is the

rose-water one, "defaulting"; and men have plotted without compunction the downfall of the government, and plundered its treasury, as "secessionists," who would have expected to dangle at the rope's end, or to be shot down like dogs, had they regarded themselves as rebels or traitors. So Pistol objected to the odious word "steal,"—"*convey* the wise it call." There are multitudes of persons who can sit for hours at a festive table, gorging themselves, Gargantua-like, "with links and chitterlings," and guzzling whole bottles of champagne, under the impression that they are "jolly fellows," "true epicureans," and "connoisseurs in good living," whose cheeks would tingle with indignation and shame if they were accused, in point-blank terms, of vices so disgusting as intemperance or gluttony. "I am not a slut," boasts Audrey, in "As You Like It," "though I thank the gods I am foul."

Of all classes of men whose callings tempt them to juggle with words, none better than auctioneers understand how much significance lies in certain shades of expression. It is told of Robins, the famous London auctioneer, who in selling his wares revelled in an oriental luxury of expression, that in puffing an estate he described a certain ancient gallows as a "hanging wood." At another time, having made the beauties of the earthly paradise which he was commissioned to sell too gorgeously enchanting, and finding it necessary to blur it by a fault or two, lest it should prove "too good for human nature's daily food," the Hafiz of the mart paused a moment, and reluctantly added: "But candor compels me to add, gentlemen, that there are two drawbacks to this splendid property,—*the litter of the rose leaves and the noise of the nightingales.*"

It is hardly possible to estimate the mischief which is done to society by the debasement of its language in the various ways we have indicated. When the only words we have by which to designate the personifications of nobleness, manliness, courtesy and truth are systematically applied to all that is contemptible and vile, who can doubt that these high qualities themselves will ultimately share in the debasement to which their proper names are subjected? Who does not see how vast a difference it must make in our estimate of any species of wickedness, whether we are wont to designate it, and to hear it designated, by some word which brings out its hatefulness, or by one which palliates and glosses over its foulness and deformity? How much better to characterize an ugly thing by an ugly word, that expresses moral condemnation and disgust, even at the expense of some coarseness, than to call evil good and good evil, to put darkness for light, and light for darkness, by the use of a term that throws a veil of sentiment over a sin! In reading the literature of former days, we are shocked occasionally by the bluntness and plain speaking of our fathers; but even their coarsest terms,—the "naked words, stript from their shirts,"—in which they denounced libertinism, were far less hurtful than the ceremonious delicacy which has taught men to abuse each other with the utmost politeness, to hide the loathsomeness of vice, and to express the most indecent ideas in the most modest terms.

It has been justly said that the corrupter of a language stabs straight at the very heart of his country. He commits a crime against every individual of a nation, for he poisons a stream from which all must drink; and the

poison is more subtle and more dangerous, because more likely to escape detection, than the deadliest venom with which the destructive philosophy of our day is assailing the moral or the religious interests of humanity. "Let the words of a country," says Milton in a letter to an Italian scholar, "be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare but, by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idly yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of servility?"

Sometimes the spirit which governs employers or employed, and other classes of men, in their mutual relations, is indicated by the names they give each other. Some years ago the legislature of Massachusetts made a law requiring that children of a certain age, employed in the factories of that State, should be sent to school a certain number of weeks in the year. While visiting the factories to ascertain whether this wise provision of the State government was complied with, an officer of the State inquired of the agent of one of the principal factories at New Bedford, whether it was the custom to do anything for the physical, intellectual, or moral welfare of the work people. The reply would not have been inappropriate from the master of a plantation, or the captain of a coolie ship: "We never do; as for myself, I regard my work people as I regard *my machinery*. . . They must look out for *themselves*, as I do for *myself*. When my machinery gets old and useless, I reject it and get new; and these people are a part of my machinery." Another agent in another part of the State replied to a similar question, that "he used his mill hands *as he used his horse;*

as long as the horse was in good condition and rendered good service, he treated him well; otherwise he got rid of him as soon as he could, and what became of him afterward was no affair of his."

But we need not multiply illustrations to show the moral power of words. As the eloquent James Martineau says: "Power they certainly have. They are alive with sweetness, with terror, with pity. They have eyes to look at you with strangeness or with response. They are even creative, and can wrap a world in darkness for us, or flood it with light. But in all this, they are not signs of the weakness of humanity: they are the very crown and blossom of its supreme strength; and the poet whom this faith possesses will, to the end of time, be master of the critic whom it deserts. The whole inner life of men moulds the forms of language, and is moulded by them in turn; and as surely pines when they are rudely treated as the plant whose vessels you bruise or try to replace with artificial tubes. The grouping of thought, the musical scale of feeling, the shading and harmonies of color in the spectrum of imagination, have all been building, as it were, the molecules of speech into their service; and if you heedlessly alter its dispositions, pulverize its crystals, fix its elastic media, and turn its transparent into opaque, you not only disturb expression, you dislodge the very things to be expressed. And in proportion as the idea or sentiment thus turned adrift is less of a mere personal characteristic, and has been gathering and shaping its elements from ages of various affection and experience, does it become less possible to replace it by any equivalents, or dispense with its function by any act of will."

To conclude: there is one startling fact connected with

words, which should make all men ponder what they utter. Not only is every wise and every idle word recorded in the book of divine remembrance, but modern science has shown that they produce an abiding impression on the globe we inhabit. Plunge your hand into the sea, and you raise its level, however imperceptibly, at the other side of the globe. In like manner, the pulsations of the air, once set in motion, never cease; its waves, raised by each sound, travel the entire round of earth's and ocean's surface; and in less than twenty-four hours, every atom of atmosphere takes up the altered movement resulting from that sound. The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are written in imperishable characters all that man has spoken, or even whispered. Not a word that goes from the lips into the air can ever die, until the atmosphere which wraps our huge globe in its embrace has passed away forever, and the heavens are no more. There, till the heavens are rolled together as a scroll, will still live the jests of the profane, the curses of the ungodly, the scoffs of the atheist, "keeping company with the hours," and circling the earth with the song of Miriam, the wailing of Jeremiah, the low prayer of Stephen, the thunders of Demosthenes, and the denunciations of Burke.

"Words are mighty, words are living;
Serpents, with their venomous stings,
Or, bright angels, crowding round us
With heaven's light upon their wings;
Every word has its own spirit,
True or false, that never dies;
Every word man's lips have uttered
Echoes in God's skies."

CHAPTER III.

GRAND WORDS.

The fool hath planted his memory with an army of words.—SHAKESPEARE.

In the commerce of speech use only coin of gold and silver. . . Be profound with clear terms, and not with obscure terms.—JOUBERT.

The more you have studied foreign languages, the more you will be disposed to keep Ollendorff in the background; the proper result of such acquirements is visible in a finer ear for words.—T. W. HIGGINSON.

Never be grandiloquent when you want to drive home a searching truth. Don't whip with a switch that has the leaves on, if you want to tingle.—H. W. BEECHER.

IT is a trite remark that words are the representatives of things and thoughts, as coin represents wealth. You carry in your pocket a doubloon or a dollar, stamped by the king or state, and you are the virtual owner of whatever it will purchase. But who affixes the stamp upon a word? No prince or potentate was ever strong enough to make or unmake a single word. Cæsar confessed that with all his power he could not do it, and Claudius could not introduce even a new letter. He attempted to introduce the consonant V, as distinct from U, the Roman alphabet having but one character for both; but he could not make his subjects accept the new letter, though he could kill or plunder them at pleasure. Cicero tried his hand at word-coining; but though he proved a skilful mint-master, and struck some admirable trial pieces, which were absolutely needed to facilitate mental exchanges, yet they did not gain circulation, and were thrown back upon his hands. But that which defied the power of Cæsar and of Cicero does not transcend the

ability of many writers of our own day, some of whom are adepts in the art of word-coining, and are daily minting terms and phrases which must make even Noah Webster, boundless as was his charity for new words, turn in his grave. It is doubtful, however, whether these persons do so much damage to our noble English language as those who vulgarize it by the use of penny-a-liner phrases. There is a large and growing class of speakers and writers, on both sides of the Atlantic, who, apparently despising the homely but terse and telling words of their mother tongue, never use a Saxon term, if they can find what Lord Brougham calls a "long-tailed word in '*osity* or '*ation*" to do its work.

What is the cause of this? Is it the extraordinary, not to say excessive, attention now given by persons of all ages to foreign languages, to the neglect of our own? Is it the comparative inattention given to correct diction by the teachers in the schools of to-day; or is it because the favorite books of the young are sensational stories, made pungent, and, in a sense, natural, through the lavish use of all the colloquialisms and vulgarisms of low life? Shall we believe that it is because there is little individuality and independence in these days, that the words of so few persons are flavored with their idiosyncrasies; that it is from conscious poverty of thought that they try to trick out their ideas in glittering words and phrases, just as, by means of high-heeled boots, a laced coat, and a long feather, a fellow with a little soul and a weak body might try to pass muster as a bold grenadier? Or is it because of the prevalent mania for the sensational,— the craving for novelty and excitement, which is almost universal in these days,— that so many persons make sense subservient

to sound, and avoid calling things by their proper names? Or, finally, to take a more charitable view of the case, is it because it is impossible for inaccurate minds to hit the exact truth, and describe a thing just as they have seen it,—to express degrees of feeling, to observe measures and proportions, and define a sensation as it was felt? Was Talleyrand wrong when he said that language was given to man to conceal his thought; and was it really given to hide his want of thought? Is it, indeed, the main object of expression to convey the smallest possible amount of meaning with the greatest possible amount of appearance of meaning; and, since nobody can be "so wise as Thurlow looked," to look as wise as Thurlow while uttering the veriest truisms?

Be all this as it may, in nothing else is the lack of simplicity, which is so characteristic of our times, more marked than in the prevailing forms of expression. "The curse and the peril of language in our day, and particularly in this country," says an American critic, who may, perhaps, croak at times, but who has done much good service as a literary policeman in the repression of verbal licentiousness, "is that it is at the mercy of men who, instead of being content to use it well, according to their honest ignorance, use it ill, according to their affected knowledge; who, being vulgar, would seem elegant; who, being empty, would seem full; who make up in pretence what they lack in reality; and whose little thoughts, let off in enormous phrases, sound like firecrackers in an empty barrel." In the estimation of many writers at the present day, the great, crowning vice in the use of words is, apparently, to employ plain, straightforward English. The simple Saxon is not good enough

for their purposes, and so they array their ideas in "big, dictionary words," derived from the Latin, and load their style with expletives as tasteless as the streamers of tattered finery that flutter about the person of a dilapidated belle. The "high polite," in short, is their favorite style, and the good old Spartan rule of calling a spade a spade they hold in thorough contempt. Their great recipe for elegant or powerful writing is to call the most common things by the most uncommon names. Provided that a word is out-of-the-way, unusual, or far-fetched,— and especially if it is one of many syllables,— they care little whether it is apt and fit or not.

With them a fire is always "the devouring element," or a "conflagration"; and the last term is often used where there is no meeting of flames, as when a town is fired in several places, but when only one building is burned; the fire never burns a house, but it always "consumes an edifice," unless it is got under, in which case "its progress is arrested." A railroad accident is always "a holocaust," and its victims are named under the "death roll." A man who is the first to do a thing "takes the initiative." Instead of loving a woman, a man "becomes attached" to her; instead of losing his mother by death, he "sustains a bereavement of his maternal relative." A dog's tail, in the pages of these writers, is his "caudal appendage"; a dog breaker, "a kunopædist"; and a fish-pond they call by no less lofty a title than "piscine preserve." Ladies, in their classic pages, have ceased to be married, like those poor, vulgar creatures, their grandmothers; they are "led to the hymeneal altar." Of the existence of such persons as a man, a woman, a boy, or a girl, these writers are profoundly ignorant; though

they often speak of "individuals," "gentlemen," "characters," and "parties," and often recognize the existence of "juveniles" and "juvenile members of the community." "Individual" is another piece of pompous inanity which is very current now. In "Guesses at Truth" mention is made of a celebrated preacher, who was so destitute of all feeling for decorum in language, as to call our Saviour "this eminent *individual*." "Individual" is a good Latin word, and serves a good purpose when it distinguishes a person from a people or class, as it served a good purpose in the scholastic philosophy; but would Cicero or Duns Scotus have called a great man an *eminens individuum?* These "individuals," strange to say, are never dressed, but always "attired"; they never take off their clothes, but "divest themselves of their habiliments," which is so much grander.

"In the church," says St. Paul, "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." Not so think some of the preachers of the Gospel of the present day, if we may judge them by the language they use in their discourses. To give their sermons a philosophical air, or because simple language is not to their taste, they invest their discourses with the technicalities of science and philosophy. They never speak of so old-fashioned a thing as the will, but always of "volition"; duty, with them, is never duty simply, but always "moral obligation"; and their sermons abound in "necessary relations," "moral and physical necessities," "intellectual processes," "laws of nature," and "arguments *a priori* and *a posteriori*." It was a preacher of this class, who having occasion to tell his hearers that there was

not one Gospel for the rich and another for the poor, informed them that, "if they would not be saved on 'general principles,' they could not be saved at all." Who can doubt that such language as this is not only poorly understood, if understood it is, by the ordinary hearer, but is far less effective than the simple Saxon words which might be used to convey the same ideas? Some years ago a white minister preached in a plain, direct style to a church of negroes in the South, whose "colored" pastor was greatly addicted to the use of high-flown language in his sermons. In the season of exhortation and prayer that followed, an old negro thanked the Lord for the various blessings of the Sabbath and the sanctuary, and especially, he added, "we thank Thee that to-day we have been fed from *a low crib*." Would it not be well for preachers generally to remember that many of Christ's flock are "little ones," whose necks are short, and that they may consequently starve, if their food, however nutritious, is placed in too lofty a crib?

But preachers are not the only anti-Saxons of our day; we may find them in nearly all the classes of society,— persons who never tell us that a man is asleep, but say that he is "locked in slumber"; who deem it vulgar, and perhaps cruel, to say that a criminal was hanged, but very elegant to say that he was "launched into eternity." A person of their acquaintance never does so low a thing as to break his leg; he "fractures his limb." They never see a man fall; but sometimes see "an individual precipitated." Our Latin friends,— fortunate souls,— never have their feelings hurt, though it must be confessed that their "sensibilities" are sometimes dreadfully "lacerated." Above the necessities of their poor fellow-creatures, they

never do so vulgar a thing as to eat a meal; they always "partake of a repast," which is so much more elegant. They never do so commonplace a thing as to take a walk; they "make a pedestrian excursion." A conjurer with them is a "prestidigitator"; a fortune-teller, a "vaticinator." As Pascal says, they mask all nature. There is with them no king, but an "august monarch"; no Paris, but a "capital of a kingdom." Even our barbers have got upon stilts. They no longer sell tooth-powder and shaving-soap, like the old fogies, their fathers, but "odonto," and "dentifrice," and "rypophagon"; and they themselves, from the barber-ous persons they once were, have been transformed into "*artists* in hair." The medical faculty, too, have caught the spirit of the age. Who would suspect that "epistaxis" means simply bleeding at the nose, and "emollient cataplasm" only a poultice? Fancy one school-boy doubling up his fist at another, and telling him to look out for epistaxis! Who would dream that "anheidro-hepseterion" (advertised in the London "Times") means only a saucepan, or "taxidermist" a bird-stuffer? Is it not remarkable that tradesmen have ceased "sending in" their "little bills," and now only "render their accounts"?

"There are people," says Landor, "who think they write and speak finely, merely because they have forgotten the language in which their fathers and mothers used to talk to them." As in dress, deportment, etc., so in language, the dread of vulgarity, as Whately has suggested, constantly besetting those who are half conscious that they are in danger of it, drives them into the opposite extreme of affected finery. They act upon the advice of Boileau:

"Quoique vous écriviez, évitez la bassesse;
Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse;"

and, to avoid the undignified, according to them, it is only necessary not to call things by their right names. Hence the use of "residence" for house, "electric fluid" for lightning, "recently deceased" for lately dead, "encomium" for praise, "location" for place, "locate" for put, "lower limb" for leg, "sacred edifice" for church, "attired" for clad,—all of which have so learned an air, and are preferred to the simpler words for the same reason, apparently, that led Mr. Samuel Weller, when writing his famous valentine to Mary, to prefer "circumscribed" to "circumwented," as having a deeper meaning.

Such persons forget that glass will obstruct the light quite as much when beautifully painted as when discolored with dirt; and that a style studded with far-fetched epithets and high-sounding phrases may be as dark as one abounding in colloquial vulgarisms. Who does not sympathize with the indignation of Dr. Johnson, when, taking up at the house of a country friend a so called "Liberal Translation of the New Testament," he read, in the eleventh chapter of John, instead of the simple and touching words, "Jesus wept,"—"Jesus, the Saviour of the world, overcome with grief, burst into a flood of tears"? "*Puppy!*" exclaimed the critic, as he threw down the book in a rage; and had the author been present, Johnson would doubtless have thrown it at his head. Yet the great literary bashaw, while he had an eagle's eye for the faults of others, was unconscious of his own sins against simplicity, and, though he spoke like a wit, too often wrote like a pedant. He had, in fact, a dialect of his own, which has been wittily styled *Johnsonese*. Goldsmith hit him in a vulnerable spot when he said: "Doctor, if you were to write a fable about little fishes,

you would make them talk like whales." The faults of his pompous, swelling diction, in which the frivolity of a coxcomb is described in the same rolling periods and with the same gravity of antithesis with which he would thunder against rebellion and fanaticism, are hardly exaggerated by a wit of his own time who calls it

> "A turgid style,
> Which gives to an inch the importance of a mile;
> Uplifts the club of Hercules — for what?
> To crush a butterfly, or brain a gnat;
> Bids ocean labor with tremendous roar,
> To heave a cockle-shell upon the shore;
> Sets wheels on wheels in motion,—what a clatter!
> To force up one poor nipperkin of water;
> Alike in every theme his pompous art,
> Heaven's awful thunder, or a rumbling cart."

One of the latest "modern improvements" in speech is the substitution of "lady" and "female" for the good old English "woman." On the front of Cooper's Reading Room, in the city of New York, is the sign in golden letters, "Male and Female Reading Rooms." Suppose Scott, in his noble tribute to women for their devotion and tenderness to men in their hour of suffering, had sung

> "Oh, LADIES, in our hours of ease," etc.,

would not the lines have been far more touching? An English writer says truly that the law of euphemisms is somewhat capricious; "one cannot always tell which words are decent and which are not. . . It really seems as if the old-fashioned feminine of 'man' were fast getting proscribed. We, undiscerning male creatures that we are, might have thought that 'woman' was a more elegant and more distinctive title than 'female.' We read only the other day a report of a lecture on the poet Crabbe, in which she who was afterward Mrs. Crabbe was spoken of

as 'a female to whom he had formed an attachment.' To us, indeed, it seems that a man's wife should be spoken of in some way which is not equally applicable to a ewe lamb or a favorite mare. But it was a 'female' who delivered the lecture, and we suppose the females know best about their own affairs."

Can any person account for the apparent antipathy which many writers and speakers have to the good Saxon verb "to begin"? Ninety-nine out of every hundred persons one talks with are sure to prefer the French words "to commence" and "to essay," and the tendency is strong to prefer "to inaugurate" to either. Nothing in our day is begun, not even dinner; it is "inaugurated with soup." In their fondness for the French words, many persons are betrayed into solecisms. Forgetting, or not knowing, that, while "to begin" may be followed by an infinitive or a gerund, "to commence" is transitive, and must be followed by a noun or its equivalent, they talk of "commencing to do" a thing, "essaying to do well," etc. Persons who think that "begin" is not stately enough, or that it is even vulgar, would do well to look into the pages of Milton and Shakespeare. With all his fondness for Romanic words, the former hardly once uses "commence" and "commencement"; and the latter is not only content with the idiomatic word, but even shortens it, as in the well known line that depicts so vividly the guilt-wasted soul of Macbeth:

"I 'gin to grow a-weary of the sun."

What a shock would every right-minded reader receive if, upon opening his Bible, he should find, in place of the old familiar words, the following: "In the *commencement* God created the heavens and the earth," — "The fear of the

Lord is the *commencement* of wisdom!" Well did Coleridge say: "Intense study of the Bible will keep any writer from being vulgar in point of style." "Commence" is a good word enough, but, being of outlandish origin, should never take the place of "begin," except for the sake of rhythm or variety.

Another of these grand words is "imbroglio." It is from the Italian, and means an intricate or complicated plot. Why, then, should a quarrel in the Cabinet at Washington, or a prospective quarrel with France or England, be called an "imbroglio"? Again, will any one explain to us the meaning of "interpellation," so often used by the correspondents of our daily newspapers? The word properly means an interruption; yet when an opposition member of the French or Italian Parliament asks a question of a minister, he is said "to put an interpellation." Why should an army be said to be "decimated," without regard to the number or nature of its losses? The original meaning of this term was grave, and often terrible; it meant no less than taking the tenth of a man's substance, or shooting every tenth man in a mutinous regiment, the victims being called out by lot. "This appalling character of decimation lay in the likelihood that innocent persons, slain in cold blood, might suffer for the guilty. But the peculiar horror vanishes when we alter the conditions; and a regiment which has taken part in a hard-fought battle, and comes off the field only decimated,—that is to say, with nine living and unscathed for each man left on the field,—might be accounted rather fortunate than the reverse." Why, again, should "donate" be preferred to "give"? Does it show a larger soul, a more magnificent liberality, to "donate" than to give? Must we "*donate*

the devil his due," when we would be unusually charitable? Why should "elect" be preferred to "choose," when there is no election whatever; or why is "balance" preferable to "remainder"? As a writer has well said: "Would any man in his senses dare to quote King David as saying: 'They are full of children, and leave the *balance* of their substance unto their babes'? or read, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the *balance* of wrath thou shalt restrain,' where the translators of our Bible wrote 'the remainder'? And if any one went into the nursery, and telling that tale of perennial interest of the little boys that 'a-sliding went, a-sliding went, a-sliding went, all on a summer's day,' should, after recounting how 'they all fell in, they all fell in, they all fell in,' add 'the *balance* ran away,' would there not go up a chorus of tiny but indignant protests against this mutilation, which would enlist a far wider sympathy than some of the proposed changes in the texts of classic authors, which have set editors and commentators at loggerheads?"

Again, why should one say "rendition" for performance, "enactment" for acting, or "nude" for naked? In the seventeenth century, certain fanatics in England ran about without clothes, crying: "We are the naked Truth." Had they lived in this age of refinement, instead of shocking their countrymen with such indelicate expressions, they would have said, "We are Verity in a nude condition"; and had any person clothed them, he would have been said to have "rehabilitated" them. More offensive than any of these grandiose words is "intoxicated" in place of "drunk," which it has nearly banished. A man can be intoxicated only when he has lost his wits, not by quantity, but by quality,—by drinking liquor that has

been drugged. "Intoxicated," however, has five syllables; drunk has but one; so the former carries the day by five to one. No doubt nine-tenths of those who drink to excess in this country, are, in fact, intoxicated, or poisoned; still, the two words should not be confounded. "Ovation" is a word often used incorrectly, as when an emperor, empress, king or queen, on making a triumphal entry into the capital of a state amid great popular enthusiasm, is said to receive an "ovation," though such an honor is distinctively reserved for meritorious subjects of the ruler. Sometimes we find a word of Latin origin used in a sense precisely opposite to the true one, as when "culminate," which can be applied only to something which has reached the limit of its possible height, is used regarding the career of some wrong-doer, which is said to "culminate" in the lowest depths of degradation.

Solomon tells us that there is nothing new under the sun; and this itching for pompous forms of expression, this contempt for plainness and simplicity of style, is as old as Aristotle. In the third book of his "Rhetoric," discussing the causes of frigidity of style, he speaks of one Alcidamas, a writer of that time, as "employing ornaments, not as seasonings to discourse, but as if they were the only food to live upon. He does not say 'sweat,' but 'the humid sweat'; a man goes not to the Isthmian games, but to 'the collected assembly of the Isthmian solemnity'; laws are 'the legitimate kings of commonwealths'; and a race, 'the incursive impulse of the soul.' A rich man is not bountiful, but the 'artificer of universal largess.'" Is it not curious that our modern Quicklys and Malaprops, who often pride themselves upon their taste for swelling words and phrases, and their skill in using them, should

have been anticipated by Alcidamas two thousand years ago?

The abuse of the queen's English, to which we have called attention, did not begin with Americans. It began with our transatlantic cousins, who employed "ink-horn" terms and outlandish phrases at a very early period. In "Harrison's Chronicle" we are told that after the Norman conquest "the English tongue grew into such contempt at court that most men thought it no small dishonor to speak any English there; which bravery took his hold at the last likewise in the country with every ploughman, that even the very carters began to wax weary of their mother tongue, and labored to speak French, which was then counted no small token of gentility."

The English people of to-day are quite as much addicted to the grandiose style as the Americans. Gough, in one of his lectures, speaks of a card which he saw in London, in which a man called himself "Illuminating Artist to Her Majesty," the fact being that he lighted the gas lamps near the palace. Mr. E. A. Freeman, the English historian, complained in a recent lecture that our language had few friends and many foes, its only friends being ploughboys and a few scholars. The pleasant old "inns" of England, he said, had disappeared, their places being supplied by "hotels," or "establishments"; while the landlord had made way for the "lessee of the establishment." A gentleman going into a shop in Regent street to buy half-mourning goods was referred by the shopman to "the mitigated affliction department." The besetting sin of some of the ablest British writers of this century is their lack of simplicity of language. Sydney Smith said of Sir James Mackintosh, that if he were asked for a definition of "pep-

per," he would reply thus: "Pepper may philosophically be described as a dusty and highly pulverized seed of an oriental fruit; an article rather of condiment than diet, which, dispersed lightly over the surface of food, with no other rule than the caprice of the consumer, communicates pleasure, rather than affords nutrition; and by adding a tropical flavor to the gross and succulent viands of the North, approximates the different regions of the earth, explains the objects of commerce, and justifies the industry of man."

Francis Jeffrey, the celebrated critic, had, even in conversation, an artificial style and language, which were fit only for books and a small circle of learned friends. His diction and pronunciation, it is said, were unintelligible to the mass of his countrymen, and in the House of Commons offensive and ridiculous. An anecdote told in illustration of this peculiarity strikingly shows the superiority of simple to high-flown language in the practical business of life. In a trial, which turned upon the intellectual competency of a testator, Jeffrey asked a witness, a plain countryman, whether the testator was "a man of intellectual capacity," —"an intelligent, shrewd man,"—"a man of capacity?" "Had he ordinary mental endowments?" "What d'ye mean, sir?" asked the witness. "I mean," replied Jeffrey, testily, "was the man of sufficient ordinary intelligence to qualify him to manage his own affairs?" "I dinna ken," replied the chafed and mystified witness,—"Wad ye say the question ower again, sir?" Jeffrey being baffled, Cockburn took up the examination. He said: "Ye kenned Tammas ——?" "Ou, ay; I kenned Tammas weel; me and him herded together when we were laddies [boys]." "Was there onything in the cretur?" "De'il a thing but

what the spune [spoon] put into him." "Would you have trusted him to sell a cow for you?" "A cow! I wadna lippened [trusted] him to sell a calf." Had Jeffrey devoted a review article to the subject, he could not have given a more vivid idea of the testator's incapacity to manage his own affairs.

Our readers need not be told how much Carlyle has done to teutonize our language with his "yardlongtailed" German compounds. It was a just stroke of criticism when a New York auctioneer introduced a miscellaneous lot of books to a crowd with the remark: "Gentlemen, of this lot I need only say, six volumes are by Thomas Carlyle; the seventh is written in the *English* language." Some years ago, a learned doctor of divinity and university professor in Canada wrote a work in which, wishing to state the simple fact that the "rude Indian" had learned the use of firing, he delivered himself as follows: "He had made slave of the heaven-born element, the brother of the lightning, the grand alchemist and artificer of all times, though as yet he knew not all the worth or magical power that was in him. By his means the sturdy oak, which flung abroad its stalwart arms and waved its leafy honors defiant in the forest, was made to bow to the behest of the simple aborigines." As the plain Scotchwoman said of De Quincey, "the bodie has an awfu' sicht o' words!" This style of speaking and writing has become so common that it can no longer be considered wholly vulgar. It is gradually working upward; it is making its way into official writings and grave octavos; and is even spoken with unction in pulpits and senates. Metaphysicians are wont to define words as the signs of ideas; but with many persons, they appear to be, not so

much the signs of their thought, as the signs of the signs of their thought. Such, doubtless, was the case with the Scotch clergyman, whom a bonneted abhorrer of legal preaching was overheard eulogizing: "Man, John, wasna yon preachin'! — yon's something for a body to come awa wi'. The way that he smashed down his text into so mony heads and particulars, just a' to flinders! Nine heads and twenty particulars in ilka head — and *sic mouthfu's o' grand words!* — an' every ane o' them fu' o' meaning, if we but kent them. We hae ill improved our opportunities; man, if we could just mind onything he said, it would do us guid."

The whole literature of notices, handbills, and advertisements, in our day, has apparently declared "war to the knife" against every trace of the Angles, Jutes and Saxons. We have no schoolmasters now; they are all "principals of collegiate institutes"; no copy-books, but "specimens of caligraphy"; no ink, but "writing fluid"; no physical exercise, but "calisthenics" or "gymnastics." A man who opens a groggery at some corner for the gratification of drunkards, instead of announcing his enterprise by its real name, modestly proclaims through the daily papers that his "saloon" has been fitted up for the reception of customers. Even the learned architects of log cabins and pioneer cottages can find names for them only in the sonorous dialects of oriental climes. Time was when a farmhouse was a farmhouse and a porch a porch; but now the one is a "villa" or "hacienda," and the other nothing less than a "veranda." In short, this genteel slang pursues us from the cradle to the grave. In old times, when our fathers and mothers died, they were placed in coffins, and buried in the graveyard or burying ground;

now, when an unfortunate "party" or "individual" "deceases" or "becomes defunct," he is deposited in a "burial casket" and "interred in a cemetery." It matters not that the good old words "grave" and "graveyard" have been set in the pure amber of the English classics,—that the Bible says, "There is no wisdom in the grave," "Cruel as the grave," etc. How much more pompous and magniloquent the Greek: "There is no wisdom in the cemetery," "Cruel as the cemetery!"

Seriously, let us eschew all these vulgar fineries of style, as we would eschew the fineries of a dandy. Their legitimate effect is to barbarize our language, and to destroy all the peculiar power, distinctiveness, and appropriateness of its terms. Words that are rarely used will at last inevitably disappear; and thus, if not speedily checked, this grandiloquence of expression will do an irreparable injury to our dear old English tongue. Poetry may for a while escape the effects of this vulgar coxcombry, because it is the farthest out of the reach of such contagion; but, as prose sinks, so must poetry, too, be ultimately dragged down into the general gulf of feebleness and inanition.

It was a saying of John Foster that "eloquence resides in the thought, and no words, therefore, can make that eloquent which will not be so in the plainest that could possibly express the same." Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the notion that the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal of pompous and sonorous language are necessary to the expression of the sublime and powerful in eloquence and poetry. So far is this from being true, that the finest, noblest, and most spirit-stirring sentiments ever uttered, have been couched, not in sounding poly-

syllables from the Greek or Latin, but in the simplest Saxon,— in the language we hear hourly in the streets and by our firesides. Dr. Johnson once said that "big thinkers require big words." He did not think so at the time of the great Methodist movement in the last century, when "the ice period" of the establishment was breaking up. He attributed the Wesleys' success to their plain, familiar way of preaching, "which," he says, "clergymen of genius and learning ought to do from a principle of duty." Arthur Helps tells a story of an illiterate soldier at the chapel of Lord Morpeth's castle in Ireland. Whenever Archbishop Whately came to preach, it was observed that this rough private was always in his place, mouth open, as if in sympathy with his ears. Some of the gentlemen playfully took him to task for it, supposing it was due to the usual vulgar admiration of a celebrated man. But the man had a better reason, and was able to give it. He said, "That isn't it at all. The Archbishop is easy to understand. There are no fine words in him. A fellow like me, now, can follow along and take every bit of it in." "Whately's simplicity," observes a writer to whom we are indebted for this illustration, "meant no lack of pith or power. The whole momentum of his large and healthy brain went into those homely sentences, rousing and feeding the rude and the cultured hearer's hunger alike, as sweet bread and juicy meat satisfy a natural appetite."

Emerson observes that as any orator at the bar or the senate rises in his thought, he descends in his language; that is, when he rises to any height of thought or of passion, he comes down to a level with the ear of all his audience. "It is the oratory of John Brown and of Abraham Lincoln, the one at Charleston, the other at

Gettysburg, in the two best specimens of oratory we have had in this country." Daniel Webster, in his youth, was a little bombastic in his speeches; but he very soon discovered that the force of a sentence depends chiefly on its meaning, and that great writing is that in which much is said in few words, and those the simplest that will answer the purpose. Having made this discovery, he became "a great eraser of adjectives"; and whether convincing juries, or thundering in the senate,—whether demolishing Hayne, or measuring swords with Calhoun,—on all occasions used the plainest words. "You will find," said he to a friend, "in my speeches to juries, no hard words, no Latin phrases, no *fieri facias;* and that is the secret of my style, if I have any."

Chaucer says, in praise of his Virginia, that

> "No contrefited termes had she
> To semen wise;"

and if any one would write or speak well, his English should be genuine, not counterfeit. The simplest words that will convey one's ideas are always best. What can be simpler and yet more sublime than the "Let there be light, and there was light!" of Moses, which Longinus so admired? Would it be an improvement to say, "Let there be light, and there was a solar illumination"? "I am like a child picking up pebbles on the seashore," said Newton. Had he said he was like an awe-struck votary, lying prostrate before the stupendous majesty of the cosmical universe, and the mighty and incomprehensible *Ourgos* which had created all things, we might think it very fine, but should not carry in our memories such a luggage of words. The fiery eloquence of the field and the forum springs upon the vulgar idiom as a soldier

leaps upon his horse. "Trust in the Lord, and keep your powder dry," said Cromwell to his soldiers on the eve of a battle. "Silence, you thirty voices!" roars Mirabeau to a knot of opposers around the tribune. "I'd sell the shirt off my back to support the war!" cries Lord Chatham; and again, "Conquer the Americans! I might as well think of driving them before me with this crutch." "I know," says Kossuth, speaking of the march of intelligence, "that the light has spread, and that *even the bayonets think.*" "You may shake me, if you please," said a little Yankee constable to a stout, burly culprit whom he had come to arrest, and who threatened violence, "but recollect, if you do it, you don't shake a chap of five-feet-six; you've *got to shake the whole State of Massachusetts!*" When a Hoosier was asked by a Yankee how much he weighed,—"Well," said he, "commonly I weigh about one hundred and eighty; but *when I'm mad I weigh a ton!*" "Were I to die at this moment," wrote Nelson after the battle of the Nile, "'*more frigates*' would be found written on my heart." The "Don't give up the ship!" of our memorable sea-captain stirs the heart like the sound of a trumpet. Had he exhorted the men to fight to the last gasp in defence of their imperilled liberties, their altars, and the glory of America, the words might have been historic, but they would not have been quoted vernacularly, as they have been, for over threescore years and ten.

There is another phase of the popular leaning to the grandiose style, which is not less reprehensible than that which we have noticed; we mean the affectation of foreign words and phrases. As foreign travel has increased, and the study of foreign languages has become fashionable in

our country, this vice has spread till society in some places, like Armado and Holofernes, seems to have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps. Many persons scarcely deign to call anything by its proper English name, but, as if they believed with Butler, that

> "He that's but able to express
> No sense at all in several languages,
> Will pass for learneder than he that's known
> To speak strongest reason in his own,"—

they apply to it some German, French, or Italian word. In their dialect people are *blasés*, and *passés*, or have *un air distingué; in petto*, *dolce far niente*, are among their pet phrases; and not infrequently they betray their ignorance by some ludicrous blunder, as when they use *boquet* for *bouquet*, *soubriquet* for *sobriquet*, and talk of a *sous*, instead of a *sou*, a mistake as laughable as the Frenchman's "un pence." Some of the modern fashionable novelists and writers of books of travel have even shown so bad a taste as to state in German, French, or Italian, whatever is supposed to have been said by Germans, Frenchmen, or Italians. In Currer Bell's "Villette" a large proportion of the dialogue, even in pages containing the very marrow of the plot, is thus written in French, making the book, though an English book, unintelligible to an Englishman, however familiar with his native tongue, unless he has mastered a foreign one also, and that not in its purity, but "after the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe." In striking contrast to this taste for exotics is the rooted dislike which the French have to foreign words and idioms. It is only in cases of the direst necessity that they consent to borrow from their neighbors, whether in *perfide Angleterre* or elsewhere. Even when

they deign to adopt a new word, they so disguise it that the parent language would not know it again. They strip it gradually of its foreign dress, and make it assume the costume of the country. "Beefsteak" is turned into *bifteck;* "plum-pudding" is metamorphosed into *pouding de plomb;* "partner" becomes *partenaire;* "riding-coat" becomes *redingote;* and now fashionable English tailors advertise these "redingotes," never for a moment dreaming that they are borrowing an expression which the French stole from the English. It was their contempt for the practice of borrowing foreign words that enabled the Greeks to preserve their native tongue so long in its purity; while on the contrary, by an affectation in the Romans of Greek words and idioms, the Latin language was not only corrupted, but lost in a few centuries much of the beauty and majesty it had in the Augustan age.

It is said that the Spaniards, in all ages, have been distinguished for their love of long and high-flown names, — the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal of appellative glory and honor. In looking at the long string of titles fastened like the tail of a kite to the name of some Don or other grandee, one is puzzled to tell whether it is the man that belongs to the name, or the name to the man. There is nothing odd, therefore, in the conduct of that Spaniard, who, whenever his name was mentioned, always took off his hat in token of respect to himself,— that is, as the possessor of so many appellations. A person of high diplomatic talent, with the unpretending and rather plebeian name of "Bubb," was once nominated to represent Great Britain at Madrid. Lord Chesterfield was then a minister of state, and on seeing the newly appointed minister remarked,—"My dear fellow, your name will damn

you with the Spaniards; a one-syllable patronymic will infallibly disgust the grandees of that hyperbolic nation." "What shall I do?" said Bubb. "Oh, that is easily managed," rejoined the peer; "get yourself dubbed, before you start on your mission, as Don Vaco y Hijo Hermoso y Toro y Sill y Bubb, and on your arrival you will have all the Spanish Court at your feet."

The effort of the Spaniards to support their dignity by long and sounding titles is repeated daily, in a slightly different form, by many democratic Americans. Writers and speakers are constantly striving to compensate for poverty of thought by a multitude of words. Magniloquent terms, sounding sentences, unexpected and startling phrases, are dropped from pen and tongue, as gaudy and high-colored goods are displayed in shop windows, to attract attention. "Ruskin," says an intelligent writer, "long ago cried out against the stuccoed lies which rear their unblushing fronts on so many street corners, shaming our civilization, and exerting their whole influence to make us false and pretentious. Mrs. Stowe and others have warned us against the silken lies that, frizzled, flounced, padded, compressed, lily-whitened and rouged, flit about our drawing rooms by gaslight, making us familiar with sham and shoddy, and luring us away from real and modest worth. Let there be added to these complaints the strongest denunciation of the kindred literary lies which hum about our ears and glitter before our eyes, which corrupt the language, and wrong every man and woman who speaks it by robbing it of some portion of its beauty and power."

When shall we learn that the secret of beauty and of force, in speaking and in writing, is not to say simple

things finely, but to say fine things as simply as possible? "To clothe," says Fuller, "low creeping matter with high-flown language is not fine fancy, but flat foolery. It rather loads than raises a wren to fasten the feathers of an ostrich to her wings." It is a significant fact that the books over which generation after generation of readers has hung with the deepest delight,—which have retained their hold, amid all the fluctuations of taste, upon all classes,—have been written in the simplest and most idiomatic English, that English for which the "fine school" of writers would substitute a verbose and affected phraseology. Such books are "Robinson Crusoe," "Gulliver's Travels," and "Pilgrim's Progress," which Macaulay has justly characterized as treasures of pure English. Fitz-Greene Halleck tells us that some years ago a letter fell into his hands which a Scotch servant girl had written to her lover. The style charmed him, and his literary friends agreed that it was fairly inimitable. Anxious to clear up the mystery of its beauty, and even elegance, he searched for its author, who thus solved the enigma: "Sir, I came to this country four years ago. Then I did not know how to read or write. Since then I have learned to read and write, but I have not yet learned how to spell; so always when I sit down to write a letter, I choose those words which are so short and simple that I am sure to know how to spell them." This was the whole secret. The simple-minded Scotch girl knew more of rhetoric than Blair or Campbell. As Halleck forcibly says: "Simplicity is beauty. Simplicity is power."

It is through the arts and sciences, whose progress is so rapid, that many words of "learned length and thundering sound" force their way in these days into the

language. The vocabulary of science is so repugnant to the ear and so hard to the tongue, that it is a long while before its terms become popularized. We may be sure that many years will elapse before "aristolochioid," "megalosaurus," "acanthopterygian," "nothoclæna-trichomanoides," "monopleurobranchian," "anonaceo-hydrocharideo-nymphæoid," and other such "huge verbal blocks, masses of syllabic aggregations, which both the tongue and the taste find it difficult to surmount," will establish themselves in the language of literature and common life. Still, while the lover of Anglo-Saxon simplicity is rarely shocked by such terms, there are hundreds of others, less stupendous, such as "phenomenon," "demonstrative," "inverse proportion," "transcendental," "category," "predicament," "exorbitant," which, once heard only in scientific lecture rooms or in schools, are now the common currency of the educated; and it is said that in one of our Eastern colleges, the learned mathematical professor, on whom the duty devolved one morning of making the chapel prayer, startled his hearers by asking Divine Goodness to enable them to know its length, its breadth, and its superficial contents. Should popular enlightenment go on for some ages with the prodigious strides it has lately made, a future generation may hear lovers addressing their mistresses in the terms predicted by Punch:

> "I love thee, Mary, and thou lovest me.
> Our mutual flame is like the affinity
> That doth exist between two simple bodies.
> I am Potassium to thine Oxygen.
> . . . Sweet, thy name is Briggs,
> And mine is Johnson. Wherefore should not we
> Agree to form a *Johnsonate of Briggs?*
> We will. The day, the happy day is nigh,
> When Johnson shall with beauteous Briggs combine."

It is useless, of course, to complain of the terminology of science, since inaccurate names, that connote too many things, or that are otherwise lacking in precision, would be productive of continual mischief. But indispensable as this distinctive nomenclature is, it is, no doubt, often needlessly uncouth, and it has been well said that if the language of common life were equally invariable and unelastic, imagination would be cancelled, and genius crushed. How barbarous and repulsive appear many of the long, polysyllabic, technical names of plants and flowers in our treatises on botany, when compared with such popular names as "Stag-beetle," "Rosemary," and "Forget-me-not!" To express the results of science without the ostentation of its terms, is an admirable art, known, unfortunately, to but few. How few surgeons can communicate in simple, intelligible language to a jury, in a law case, the results of a *post-mortem* examination! Almost invariably the learned witness finds a wound "in the parieties of the abdomen, opening the peritoneal cavity"; or an injury of some "vertebra in the dorsal or lumbar region"; or something else equally frightful. Some years ago, in one of the English courts, a judge rebuked a witness of this kind by saying, "You mean so and so, do you not, sir?"—at the same time translating his scientific barbarisms into a few words of simple English. "I do, my Lord." "Then why can't you *say* so?" He *had* said so, but in a foreign tongue.

To all the writers and speakers who needlessly employ grandiose or abstract terms, instead of plain Saxon ones, we would say, as Falstaff said to Pistol: "If thou hast any tidings whatever to deliver, prithee deliver them like a man of this world!" Never, perhaps, did a college

professor give a better lesson in rhetoric than was given by a plain farmer in Kennebec County, Maine, to a schoolmaster. "You are excavating a subterranean channel, it seems," said the pedagogue, as he saw the farmer at work near his house. "No, sir," was the reply, "I am only digging a ditch." A similar rebuke was once administered by the witty Governor Corwin, of Ohio, to a young lady who addressed him in high-flown terms. During a political tour through the State, he and the Hon. Thomas Ewing stayed at night at the house of a leading politician, but found no one at home but his niece, who presided at the tea-table. Having never conversed with "great men" before, she supposed she must talk to them in elephantine language. "Mr. Ewing, will you take condiments in your tea, sir?" inquired the young lady. "Yes, miss, if you please," replied the Senator. Corwin's eyes twinkled. Here was a temptation that could not be resisted. Gratified at the apparent success of her trial in talking to the United States Senator, the young lady addressed Mr. Corwin in the same manner,—"Will you take condiments in *your* tea, sir?" "Pepper and salt, but no mustard," was the prompt reply, which the lady, it is said, never forgave, declaring that the Governor was "horridly vulgar."

The faults of all those who thus barbarize our tongue would be comparatively excusable, were it so barren of resources that any man whose conceptions are clear need find difficulty in wreaking them upon expression. But the language in which Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson have sung; in which Hume, Gibbon, Froude, Motley, and Prescott have narrated; in which Addison, Swift, Newman, and Ruskin have written; and in

which Bolingbroke, Chatham, Fox, Pitt, and Webster have spoken, needs not to ask alms of its neighbors. Not only these, but a hundred other masters, have shown that it is rich enough for all the exigencies of the human mind; that it can express the loftiest conceptions of the poet, portray the deepest emotions of the human heart; that it can convey, if not the fripperies, at least the manly courtesies of polite life, and make palpable the profoundest researches of the philosopher. It is not, therefore, because of the poverty of our vocabulary that so many writers Gallicize and Germanize our tongue; the real cause is hinted at in the answer of Handel to an ambitious musician, who attributed the hisses of his hearers to a defect in the instrument on which he was playing: "The fault is not there, my friend," said the composer, jealous of the honor of the organ, on which he himself performed; "the fact is, you have no music in your *soul*."

We are aware that the English tongue,—our own cartilaginous tongue, as some one has quaintly styled it,—has been decried, even by poets who have made it discourse the sweetest music, for its lack of expressive terms, and for its excess in consonants, guttural, sibilant, or mute. It was this latter peculiarity, doubtless, which led Charles V, three centuries ago, to compare it to the whistling of birds; and others since, from the predominance of the *s*, to the continued hissing of red-hot iron in water. Madame de Stael likens it to the monotonous sound of the surge breaking on the sea-shore; and even Lord Byron,—whose own burning verse, distinguished not less by its melody than by its incomparable energy, has signally revealed the hidden harmony that lies in our short Saxon words,—

turns traitor to his native language, and in a moment of caprice denounces it for its harshness:

> "I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
> Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,
> And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,
> With syllables that breathe of the sweet South,
> And gentle liquids, gliding all so pat in,
> That not a single accent seems uncouth,
> Like our harsh, Northern, whistling, grunting guttural,
> Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter all."

It is strange that the poet could not see that, in this very selection of condemnatory terms, he has strikingly shown the wondrous expressiveness of the tongue he censures. What can be softer, more musical, or more beautifully descriptive, than the "gentle liquids gliding," and the words "breathe of the sweet South"; and where among all the languages of the "sweet South" would he have found words so well fitted to point his sarcasm, so saturated with harshness, as the terms "harsh," "uncouth," "northern," "whistling," "grunting," "guttural," "hiss," "spit," and "sputter?" It has been well said that "the hand that possesses strength and power may have as delicate a touch, when needed, as the hand of nervous debility. The English language can drop the honeyed words of peace and gentleness, and it can visit with its *withering*, *scathing*, *burning*, *blasting curse*." Again, even Addison, who wrote so musical English, contrasting our own tongue with the vocal beauty of the Greek, and forgetting that the latter is the very lowest merit of a language, being merely its *sensuous* merit, calls it brick as against marble. Waller, too, ungrateful to the noble tongue that has preserved his name, declares that

> "Poets that lasting marble seek,
> Must carve in Latin or in Greek."

Because smoothness is one of the requisites of verse, it has been hastily concluded that languages in which vowels and liquids predominate must be better adapted to poetry, and that the most mellifluous must also be the most melodious. But so far is this from being true, that, as Henry Taylor has remarked, in dramatic verse our English combinations of consonants are invaluable, both in giving expression to the harsher passions, and in imparting keenness and significancy to the language of discrimination, and especially to that of scorn.

The truth is, our language, so far from being harsh, or poor and limited in its vocabulary, is the richest and most copious now spoken on the globe. As Sir Thomas More long ago declared: "It is plenteous enough to expresse our myndes in anythinge whereof one man hath used to speak with another." Owing to its composite character, it has a choice of terms expressive of every shade of difference in the idea, compared with which the vocabulary of many other modern tongues is poverty itself. But for the impiety of the act, those who speak it might well raise a monument to the madcaps who undertook the tower of Babel; for, as the mixture of many bloods has made them the most vigorous of modern races, so has the mingling of divers tongues given them a language which is one of the noblest vehicles of thought ever vouchsafed to man. This very mingling of tongues in our language has been made the ground of an accusation against it; and the Anglo-Saxon is sometimes told by foreigners that he "has been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps"; that his dialect is "the alms-basket of wit," made up of beggarly borrowings, and is wholly lacking in originality.

It is true that the Anglo-Saxon has pillaged largely from the speech of other peoples; that he has a craving desire to annex, not only states and provinces, even whole empires, to his own, but even the best parts of their languages; that there is scarce a tongue on the globe which his absorbing genius has not laid under contribution to enrich the exchequer of his all-conquering speech. Strip him of his borrowings,—or "annexations," if you will,—and he would neither have a foot of soil to stand upon, nor a rag of language in which to clothe his shivering ideas. To say nothing of the Greek, Latin, and French, which enter so largely into the woof of the tongue, we are indebted to the Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Arabic, Hebrew, Hindoo, and even the North American Indian dialects, for many words which we cannot do without. The word-barks of our language are daily increasing in size, and terms that sprang up at Delhi and Benares four thousand years ago are to-day scaling the cliffs of the Rocky Mountains. But while the English has thus borrowed largely from other tongues, and the multifarious etymology of "its Babylonish vocabulary," as its enemies are pleased to call it, renders it, of all modern languages, one of the most difficult to master in all its wealth and power, yet it makes up in eclecticism, vigor, and abundance far more than it loses in apparent originality. Mosaic-like and heterogeneous as are its materials, it is yet no mingle-mangle or patchwork, but is as individual as the French or the German. Though the rough materials are gathered from a hundred sources, yet such is its digestive and assimilative energy that the most discordant aliments, passing through its anaconda-like stomach, are as speedily identified with its own independent existence

as the beefsteak which yesterday gave roundness to the hinder symmetry of a prize ox becomes to-morrow part and parcel of the proper substance,—the breast, leg, or arm,—of an Illinois farmer.

In fact the very caprices and irregularities of our idiom, orthography, and pronunciation, which make foreigners "stare and gasp," and are ridiculed by our own philological ultraists, are the strongest proofs of the nobleness and perfection of our language. It is the very extent to which these caprices, peculiar idioms, and exceptions prevail in any tongue, that forms the true scale of its worth and beauty; and hence we find them more numerous in Greek than in Latin,—in French or Italian than in Irish or Indian. There is less symmetry in the rugged, gnarled oak, with the grotesque contortions of its branches, which has defied the storms of a thousand years, than in the smoothly clipped Dutch yew tree; but it is from the former that we hew out the knees of mighty line-of-battle ships, while a vessel built of the latter would go to pieces in the first storm. It was our own English that sustained him who soared "above all Greek, above all Roman fame"; and the same "well of English undefiled" did not fail the myriad-minded dramatist, when

> "Each scene of many colored life he drew,
> Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new."

Nor have even these great writers, marvellous and varied as is their excellence, fathomed the powers of the language for grand and harmonious expression, or used them to the full. It has "combinations of sound grander than ever rolled through the mind of Milton; more awful than the mad gasps of Lear; sweeter than the sighs of Desdemona; more stirring than the speech of Antony; sadder than the

plaints of Hamlet; merrier than the mocks of Falstaff." To those, therefore, who complain of the poverty or harshness of our tongue, we may say, in the words of George Herbert:

> "Let foreign nations of their language boast,
> What fine variety each tongue affords;
> I like our language, as our men and coast:—
> *Who cannot dress it well, want* WIT, *not* WORDS."

CHAPTER IV.

SMALL WORDS.

It is with words as with sunbeams,—the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.—SOUTHEY.

Language is like the minim immortal among the infusoria, which keeps splitting itself into halves.—COLERIDGE.

AMONG the various forms of ingratitude, one of the commonest is that of kicking down the ladder by which one has climbed the steeps of celebrity; and a good illustration of this is the conduct of the author of the following lines, who, though indebted in no small degree for his fame to the small words, the monosyllabic music of our tongue, sneers at them as low:

> "While feeble expletives their aid do join,
> And ten low words oft creep in one dull line."

"How ingenious! how felicitous!" the reader exclaims; and, truly, Pope has shown himself wonderfully adroit in ridiculing the Saxon part of the language with words borrowed from its own vocabulary. But let no man despise little words, even though he echo the little wasp of Twickenham. Alexander Pope is a high authority in English literature; but it is long since he was regarded as having the infallibility of a Pope Alexander. The multitude of passages in his works, in which the small words form not only the bolts, pins, and hinges, but the chief material in the structure of his verse, show that he knew well enough their value; but it was hard to avoid the temptation of such a line as that quoted. "Small words," he elsewhere

says, "are generally stiff and languishing, but they may be beautiful to express melancholy." It is the old story of

> "——the ladder
> Whereto the climber upward turns his face,
> But when he once attains the utmost round,
> He then unto the ladder turns his back,
> Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
> By which he did ascend."

The truth is, the words most potent in life and literature,—in the mart, in the senate, in the forum, and at the fireside,—are small words, the monosyllables which the half-educated speaker and writer despises. All passionate expression,—the outpouring of the soul when moved to its depths,—is, for the most part, in monosyllables. They are the heart-beats, the very throbs of the brain, made visible by utterance. The will makes its giant victory strokes in little monosyllables, deciding for the right and against the wrong. In the hour of fierce temptation, at the ballot-box, in the court-room, in all the crises of life, how potent for good or evil are the little monosyllables, "Yes" and "No"! "'Yes' is the Olympian nod of approval which fills heaven with ambrosia and light; 'no' is the stamp of Jupiter which shakes heaven and darkens the faces of the gods. 'Yes:' how it trembles from the maiden's lips, the broken utterance, the key-syllable of a divine song which her heart only sings; how it echoes in the ecstatic pulses of the doubtful lover, and makes Paradise open its gates for the royal entry of the triumphing conqueror, Love. 'No,'—well might Miles Standish say that he could not stand fire if 'No' should come 'point-blank from the mouth of a woman'; what 'captain, colonel or knight-at-arms' could? 'No': 'tis the impregnable fortress,—the very Malakoff of the will; it

is the breastwork and barrier thrown up, which the charge must be fierce indeed to batter down or overleap. It is the grand and guarded tower against temptation; it is the fierce and sudden arrow through all the rings, that dismays the suitors of the dear and long-cherished and faithful Penelope, and makes the unforgotten king start from the disguise of a beggar."

Again, there is a whole class of words, and those among the most expressive in the language, of which the great majority are monosyllables. We refer to the interjections. We are aware that some philologists deny that interjections are language. Horne Tooke sneers at this whole class of words as "brutish and inarticulate," as "the miserable refuge of the speechless," and complains that, "because beautiful and gaudy," they have been suffered to usurp a place among words. "Where will you look for it" (the interjection), he triumphantly asks; "will you find it among laws, or in books of civil institutions, in history, or in any treatise of useful arts or sciences? No: you must seek for it in rhetoric and poetry, in novels, plays and romances." This acute writer has forgotten one book in which interjections abound, and awaken in the mind emotions of the highest grandeur and pathos,— namely, the Bible. But the use of this part of speech is not confined to books. It is heard wherever men interchange thought and feeling, whether on the gravest or the most trivial themes; in tones of the tenderest love and of the deadliest hate; in shouts of joy and ecstasies of rapture, and in the expression of deep anguish, remorse and despair; in short, in the outburst of every human feeling. More than this, not only is it heard in daily life, but we are told by the highest

authority that it is heard in the hallelujahs of angels, and in the continual "Holy! Holy! Holy!" of the cherubim.

What word in the English language is fuller of significance, has a greater variety of meanings, than the diminutive "Oh"? Uttered by the infant to express surprise or delight, it is used by the man to indicate fear, aspiration or appeal, and, indeed, according to the tone in which it is uttered, may voice almost any one of the emotions of which he is capable. What a volume of meaning is condensed in the derisive "Oh! oh!" which greets a silly utterance in the House of Commons! In no other assembly, perhaps, are the powers of human speech more fully exhibited; yet it was in that body that one of the most famous of interjections originated,—we mean the cry of "Hear! hear!" which, though at first an imperative verb, is now "nothing more or less than a great historical interjection," indicating, according to the tone in which it is uttered, admiration, acquiescence, indignation or derision. It has been truly said that when a large assembly is animated by a common sentiment which demands instantaneous utterance, it can find that utterance only through interjections.

Again, how many exquisite passages in poetry owe to the interjection their beauty, their pathos, or their power! "The first sincere hymn," says M. Taine, "is the one word 'O.'" This "O," the sign of the vocative, must not be confounded with "Oh!" the emotional interjection, which expresses a sentiment, as of appeal, entreaty, expostulation, etc. What depth of meaning is contained in that little word, as an expression of grief, in the following lines by Wordsworth:

"She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be!
Now she is in her grave,—and oh!
The difference to me."

What possible combination of words could be more significant than the reply "Pooh! pooh!" to a controversialist's theory, or the contemptuous "Fudge!" with which Mr. Churchill, in "The Vicar of Wakefield," sums up the pretensions of the languishing Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs:

"Virtue, my dear Lady Blarney, virtue is worth any price; but where is that to be found?"

"Fudge!"

How full of pathos is the "Alack, alack!" of Jeanie Deans at the supreme moment in her sister's trial; and how forcibly "Oho!" expresses exasperating self-felicitation at the discovery of a carefully guarded secret! What volumes of meaning are sometimes condensed into the little word "psha"! "Doubt," says Thackeray, "is always crying 'psha,' and sneering." How expressive are those almost infinitesimal words which epitomize the alternations of human life, "ah!" and "ha!" As Fuller beautifully moralizes: "'Ha!' is the interjection of laughter; 'ah!' is an interjection of sorrow. The difference between them is very small, as consisting only in the transposition of what is no substantial letter, but a bare aspiration. How quickly, in the age of a minute, in the very turning of our breath, is our mirth changed to mourning!"

"Nature in many tones complains,
Has many sounds to tell her pains:
But for her joys has only three,
And those but small ones. Ha! ha! he!"

The truth is that, so far is this class of words from being, as Max Müller contends, the mere *outskirts* of language, they are more truly words than any others. These

little words, so expressive of joy, of hope, of doubt, of fear, which leap from the heart like fiery jets from volcanic isles,— these surviving particles of the ante-Babel tongues, which spring with the flush or blanching of the face to all lips, and are understood by all men,— these "silver fragments of a broken voice," to use an expression of Tennyson's, "the only remains of the Eden lexicon in the dictionaries of all races,"—

> "The only words
> Of Paradise that have survived the fall,"—

are emphatically and preëminently language. It is doubtless true that civilization, with its freezing formalities, tends to diminish the use of interjections, as well as their natural accompaniments, gesture and gesticulation; but on the other hand, it should be noted, that there are certain interjections which are the fruits of the highest and most mature forms of human culture. Interjections, in truth, are not so much "*parts* of speech" as entire expressions of feeling or thought. They are preëminently pictorial. If I pronounce the words "house," "strike," "black," "beautifully," without other words or explanatory gestures, I say nothing distinctly; I may mean any one of a hundred things; but if I utter an interjectional exclamation, denoting joy or sorrow, surprise or fear, every person who hears me knows at once by what affection I am moved. I communicate a fact by a single syllable. Instead of ranking below other words, the interjection stands on a higher plane, because its significance is more absolute and immediate. Moreover, from these despised parts of speech has been derived a whole class of words: as, for example, in the natural interjection "ah"! *ach!* we have the root of a large class of words in the Aryan languages, such as ἄχος,

achen! "ache," "anguish," "anxious," *angustus*, and the word "agony" itself. Many words are used interjectionally which are not interjections, such as "Farewell!" "Adieu!" "Welcome!" which are to be looked upon as elliptical forms of expression. They are, in fact, abbreviated sentences, resembling the *0* for *οὐ*, "not," with which the poet Philoxenus is said to have replied in writing to the tyrant Dionysius who had invited him to the court of Syracuse. The true interjection is an apostrophe, condensed into a syllable. It is the effort of Nature to unburden herself of some intense, pressing emotion. It is the sigh of humanity for what it cannot have or hope for; for what it has lost; for what it did not value till it lost it. George Eliot thus defines it when she speaks of certain deeds as "little more than interjections, which give vent to the long passion of a life." In oratory, poetry, and the drama, the interjection plays an important part. Public speakers, especially, find it indispensable to their success. "As the most eloquent men are apt to find their language inadequate to their needs,— as still, after they have exhausted their vocabulary of other words,

> 'There hover in these restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the best,
> Which into words no virtue can digest,'

they find great need of the interjection. In their hands it deepens all assertions, gives utterance to intense longings, carries the hearer away into ultimate possibilities, and expresses the most passionate emotions in the instant of their most overwhelming power." Who that is familiar with the history of oratory, does not remember instances when these little words, so despised by grammarians, have been more impressive, more to the point, more eloquent than a long speech? The interjections of Whitefield,— his

"Ah!" of pity for the unrepentant sinner, and his "Oh!" of encouragement and persuasion for the almost converted listener,— were words of tremendous power, and formed a most potent engine in his pulpit artillery.* Garrick used to say that he would give a hundred guineas if he could say "Oh!" as Whitefield did. The condensed force of interjections,—their inherent expressiveness,—entitles them, therefore, to be regarded as the appropriate language, the mother-tongue of passion; and hence the effect of good acting depends largely on the proper introduction and just articulation of this class of words.

Shakespeare's interjections exact a rare command of modulation, and cannot be rendered with any truth except by one who has mastered the whole play. What a profound insight of the masterpiece of the poet is required of him who would adequately utter the word "indeed" in the following passage of Othello! "It contains in it," says an English writer, "the gist of the chief action of the play, and it implies all that the plot develops. It ought to be spoken with such an intonation as to suggest the diabolic scheme of Iago's conduct. There is no thought of the grammatical structure of the compound, consisting of the preposition 'in' and the substantive 'deed,' which is equivalent to 'act,' 'fact,' or 'reality.' All this vanishes and is lost in the mere iambic dissyllable which is employed as a vehicle for the feigned tones of surprise."

"*Iago.* I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
Oth. O, yes, and went between us very oft.
Iago. INDEED!
Oth. Indeed? ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?
Iago. Honest, my lord?
Oth. Honest? ay, honest!"

* "Lectures on the English Language," by G. P. Marsh.

The Greek and Latin languages abound with interjections, which are used by the orators and poets with great effect. To gratify the Athenians, as they behold their once proud enemy humbled to the dust, and draining the cup of affliction to the very last dregs, Æschylus, in his "Persai," employs almost every form of ejaculation in which abject misery can be expressed.

The English language is preëminently a language of small words. It has more monosyllables than any other modern tongue, a peculiarity which gives it a strikingly direct and straightforward character, equally removed from the indirect French and the intricate, lumbering German. Its fondness for this class of words is even greater than that of the Anglo-Saxon. Not a few of our present monosyllables, such as the verbs "to love," "bake," "beat," "slide," "swim," "bind," "blow," "brew," were, in the Anglo-Saxon, dissyllables. The English language, impatient of all superfluities, cuts down its words to the narrowest possible limits,— lopping and condensing, never expanding. Sometimes it cuts off an initial syllable, as in "gin" for "engine," "van" for "caravan," "prentice" for "apprentice," "'bus" for "omnibus," "wig" for "periwig"; sometimes it cuts off a final syllable or syllables, as in "aid" for "aidedecamp," "prim" for "primitive," "cit" for "citizen," "grog" for "grogram," "pants" for "pantaloons," "tick" for (pawnbroker's) "ticket"; sometimes it strikes out a letter, or letters, from the middle of a word, or otherwise contracts it, as in "last" for "latest," "lark" for "laverock," "since" for "sithence," "fortnight" for "fourteen nights," "lord" for "hlaford," "morning" for "morrowning," "sent" for "sended," "chirp" for "chirrup" or "cheer up," "fag" for "fa-

tigue," "consols" for "consolidated annuities." The same abbreviating processes are followed, when English words are borrowed from the Latin. Thus we have the monosyllable "strange" from the trisyllable *extraneus;* "spend" from *expendo;* "scour" from *exscorio;* "stop" from *obstipo;* "funnel" from *infundibulum;* "ply" from *plico;* "jetty" from *projectum;* "dean" from *decanus;* "count" from *computo;* "stray" from *extravagus;* "proxy" from *procurator;* "spell" from *syllabare*, etc. Not only are single Latin words thus maimed when converted into English, and their letters changed, transposed, or omitted, but often two English words are clipped and squeezed into one word. Thus from "proud" and "dance" we have "prance"; from "grave" and "rough" we have "gruff"; from "scrip" and "roll" comes "scroll"; from "tread," or "trot," and "drudge," we have "trudge." Even in the construction of its primitive monosyllables the English language manifests the same economy, and forms words of a totally different meaning by the simple change of a vowel; as, bag, beg, big, bog, bug; bat, bet, bit, bot, but; ball, bell, bill, boll, bull; or, again, by the change of the first letter; as, fight, light, might, night, right, tight,— dash, hash, lash, gash, rash, sash, wash. The final "ed" of our participles is rapidly disappearing, as a distinct syllable. Not content with suppressing half the letters of our syllables, and half the syllables of our words, we clip our vowels, in speaking, shorter than any other people, so that our language threatens to become a kind of stenology, or algebraic condensation of thought,— a pemmican of ideas. Voltaire said that the English gained two hours a day by clipping their words. The same love of brevity has shown

itself in rendering the final *e* in English always mute. In Chaucer the final *e* must often be sounded as a separate syllable, or the verse will limp. To the same cause we owe such expressions as "ten *o*'clock," instead of "*of* the clock," or "*on* the clock," and the hissing *s*, so offensive to foreign ears. The old termination of the verb, *th*, has given way to *s* in the third person singular, and *en* to a single letter in the third person plural.

The Anglo-Saxon, the substratum of our modern English, is emphatically monosyllabic; yet many of the grandest passages in our literature are made up almost exclusively of Saxon words. The English Bible abounds in grand, sublime, and tender passages, couched almost entirely in words of one syllable. The passage in Ezekiel, which Coleridge is said to have considered the sublimest in the whole Bible: "And he said unto me, son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest,"— contains seventeen monosyllables to three others. What passage in Holy Writ surpasses in energetic brevity that which describes the death of Sisera,— "At her feet he bowed, he fell; at her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; where he bowed, there he fell down dead"? Here are twenty-two monosyllables to one dissyllable thrice repeated, and that a word which is usually pronounced as a monosyllable. The lament of David over Saul and Jonathan is not surpassed in pathos by any similar passage in the whole range of literature; yet a very large proportion of these touching words are of one or two syllables:—"The beauty of Israel is slain upon the high places; how are the mighty fallen! . . Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings. . . Saul and Jonathan

were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. . . They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. . . How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Occasionally a long word is used in the current version, where a more vivid or picturesque short one might have been employed, as where our Saviour exclaims: "Oh, ye generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" In one of the older versions "brood" is used in place of "generation," with far greater effect.

The early writers, the "pure wells of English undefiled," abound in small words. Shakespeare employs them in his finest passages, especially when he would paint a scene with a few masterly touches. Hear Macbeth:

"Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood;
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in Nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance. There the murderers,
Steep'd in the colors of their trade, their daggers
Unmannerly breech'd with gore."

Are monosyllables passionless? Listen, again, to the "Thane of Cawdor":

"That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires.
The eye winks at the hand. Yet, let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see."

Two dissyllables only among fifty-two words!

Bishop Hall, in one of his most powerful satires, speak-

ing of the vanity of "adding house to house and field to field," has these beautiful lines:

> "Fond fool! six feet shall serve for all thy store,
> And he that cares for most shall find no more."

"What harmonious monosyllables!" exclaims the critic, Gifford; yet they may be paralleled by others in the same writer, equally musical and equally expressive.

Was Milton tame? He knew when to use polysyllables of "learned length and thundering sound"; but he knew also when to produce the grandest effects by the small words despised by inferior artists. Read his account of the journey of the fallen angels:

> "Through many a dark and dreary vale
> They passed, and many a region dolorous,
> O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp,
> *Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,*—
> A universe of death."

In what other language shall we find in the same number of words a more vivid picture of desolation than this? Hear, again, the lost archangel calling upon hell to receive its new possessor:

> "One who brings
> A mind not to be changed by place or time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be—all but less than He
> Whom thunder hath made greater? Here, at least,
> We shall be free; the Almighty hath not built
> Here for His envy; will not drive us hence;
> Here we may reign secure, and, in my choice,
> To reign is worth ambition, though in hell;
> Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven."

Did Collins lack lyric beauty, grace, or power? Read the following exquisite lines, in which the truth of the sentiment that "poetry is the short-hand of thought" is strikingly illustrated:

"How sleep the brave who sink to rest
By all their country's wishes blest!
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallow'd mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.

By fairy hands their knell is rung,
By forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There Honor comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay;
And Freedom shall a while repair,
To dwell a weeping hermit there."

Where, in the whole range of English poetry, shall we find anything more perfect than these lines? What a quantity and variety of thought are here condensed into two verses, like a cluster of rock crystals, sparkling and distinct, yet receiving and reflecting lustre by the combination! Poetry and picture, pathos and fancy, grandeur and simplicity, are combined in verse, the melody of which has never been surpassed. Yet, out of the seventy-nine words in these lines, sixty-two are monsyllables.

Did Byron lack force or fire? His skilful use of monosyllables is often the very secret of his charm. It is true that he too frequently resorts to quaint, obsolete, and outlandish terms, thinking thereby to render his style more gorgeous or grand. But his chief strength lies in his despotic command over the simplest forms of speech. Listen to the words in which he describes the destruction of Sennacherib:

"For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts beat but once, and forever lay still."

Here, out of forty-two words, all but four are monosyllables; and yet how exquisitely are all these monosyllables linked into the majestic and animated movement of

the anapestic measure! Again, what can be more musical and more melancholy than the opening verse of the lines in which the same poet bids adieu to his native land?

"Adieu! adieu! my native shore
Fades o'er the waters blue,
The night-winds sigh, the breakers roar,
And shrieks the wild sea-mew.

Yon sun that sets upon the sea
We follow in his flight;
Farewell awhile to him and thee,
My native land, good night!

With thee, my bark, I'll swiftly go
Athwart the foaming brine;
Nor care what land thou bear'st me to,
So not again to mine.

Welcome, welcome, ye dark blue waves
And when you fail my sight,
Welcome, ye deserts and ye caves!
My native land, good night!"

Two Latin words, "native" and "desert"; one French, "adieu"; the rest, English purely. The third and fourth lines paint the scene to the life; yet all the words but one are monosyllables.

How graceful, tender, thoughtful, and melancholy, are the following lines by Moore, of which the monosyllabic music is one of the principal charms:

"Those evening bells! those evening bells!
How many a tale their music tells,
Of youth and home, and that sweet time,
When last I heard their soothing chime.

Those joyous hours have passed away;
And many a heart, that then was gay,
Within the tomb now darkly dwells,
And hears no more those evening bells.

And so 'twill be when I am gone;
That tuneful peal will still ring on,
While other bards shall walk those dells,
And sing your praise, sweet evening bells!"

The following brief passage from one of Landor's poems strikingly illustrates the metrical effect of simple words of one syllable:

> "She was sent forth
> To bring that light which never wintry blast
> Blows out, nor rain, nor snow extinguishes —
> The light that shines from loving eyes upon
> Eyes that love back, till they can see no more."

Here, out of thirty different words, but one is a long one; nearly all the rest are monosyllables.

Herbert Spencer, in an able paper on the "Philosophy of Style," has pointed out the superior forcibleness of Saxon-English to Latin-English, and shown that it is due largely to the comparative brevity of the Saxon. If a thought gains in energy in proportion as it is expressed in fewer words, it must also gain in energy in proportion as the words in which it is expressed have fewer syllables. If surplus articulations fatigue the hearer, distract his attention, and diminish the strength of the impression made upon him, it matters not whether they consist of entire words or of parts of words. "Formerly," says an able writer, "when armies engaged in battle, they were drawn up in one long line, fighting from flank to flank; but a great general broke up this heavy mass into several files, so that he could bend his front at will, bring any troops he chose into action, and, even after the first onslaught, change the whole order of the field; and though such a broken line might not have pleased an old soldier's eye, as having a look of weakness about it, still it carried the day, and is everywhere now the arrangement. There will thus be an advantage, the advantage of suppleness, in having the parts of a word to a certain degree kept by themselves; this, indeed, is the way with all

languages as they become more refined; and so far are monosyllabic languages from being lame and ungainly, that such are the sweetest and gracefulest, as those of Asia; and the most rough and untamed (those of North America) abound in huge unkempt words,—yardlongtailed, like fiends."

I have spoken in the previous chapter of Johnson's fondness for big, swelling words, the leviathans of the lexicon, and also of certain speakers and writers in our own day, who have an equal contempt for small words, and never use one when they can find a pompous polysyllable to take its place. It is evident from the passages I have cited, that these Liliputians,—these Tom Thumbs of the dictionary,—play as important a part in our literature as their bigger and more magniloquent brethren. Horne Tooke admitted their force, when, on his trial for high treason, he said that he was "the miserable victim of two prepositions and a conjunction." Like the infusoria of our globe, so long unnoticed, which are now known to have raised whole continents from the depths of the ocean, these words, once so despised, are now rising in importance, and are admitted by scholars to form an important class in the great family of words.

The class of small words which were once contemptuously called "particles," are now acknowledged to be the very bolts, pins, and hinges of the structure of language. Their significance increases just in the degree that a nation thinks acutely and expresses its thought accurately. An uncultivated idiom can do without them; but as soon as a people becomes thoughtful, and wishes to connect and modify its ideas,—in short, to pursue metaphysical inquiries, and to reason logically,—the microscopic parts of

speech become indispensable. In some kinds of writing the almost exclusive use of small words is necessary. What would have been the fate of Bunyan's immortal book, had he told the story of the Pilgrim's journey in the ponderous, elephantine "osities" and "ations" of Johnson, or the gorgeous Latinity of Taylor? It would have been like building a boat out of timbers cut out for a ship. It is owing to this grandiose style, as much as to any other cause, that the author of the "Rambler," in spite of his sturdy strength and grasp of mind, "lies like an Egyptian king, buried and forgotten in the pyramid of his fame." When a man half understands the subject of which he speaks or writes, he will, like Goldsmith's schoolmaster, use words of "learned length and thundering sound." But when he is master of his theme, and when he feels deeply, he will use short, plain words which all can understand. Rage and fear, it has been happily said, strike out their terms like the sharp crack of the rifle when it sends its bullets straight to the point.* When, after wearily waiting in Chesterfield's ante-room, Johnson wrote his indignant letter, he broke away, to a considerable extent, from his usual elephantine style, and used short, sharp, and stinging terms.

In conclusion, when we remember that the Saxon language, the soul of the English, is essentially monosyllabic; that our language contains, of monosyllables formed by the vowel *a* alone, more than five hundred; by the vowel *e*, some four hundred and fifty; by the vowel *i*, about four hundred; by the vowel *o*, over four hundred; and by the vowel *u*, more than two hundred and fifty; we must admit that these seemingly petty and insignificant words, even

*"The Use of Short Words," by Hon. Horatio Seymour.

the microscopic particles, so far from meriting to be treated as "creepers," are of high importance, and that to know when and how to use them is of no less moment to the speaker or writer than to know when to use the grandiloquent expressions which we have borrowed from the language of Greece and Rome. To every man who has occasion to teach or move his fellow-men by tongue or pen, I would say in the words of Dr. Addison Alexander,—themselves a happy example of the thing he commends:

"Think not that strength lies in the big round word,
Or that the brief and plain must needs be weak.
To whom can this be true who once has heard
The cry for help, the tongue that all men speak
When want or woe or fear is in the throat,
So that each word gasped out is like a shriek
Pressed from the sore heart, or a strange, wild note
Sung by some fay or fiend? There is a strength
Which dies if stretched too far or spun too fine,
Which has more height than breadth, more depth than length;
Let but this force of thought and speech be mine,
And he that will may take the sleek, fat phrase,
Which glows and burns not, though it gleam and shine,—
Light, but no heat—a flash, but not a blaze!
Nor is it mere strength that the short word boasts;
It serves of more than fight or storm to tell,
The roar of waves that clash on rock-bound coasts,
The crash of tall trees when the wild winds swell,
The roar of guns, the groans of men that die
On blood-stained fields. It has a voice as well
For them that far off on their sick beds lie;
For them that weep, for them that mourn the dead;
For them that laugh, and dance, and clap their hand;
To joy's quick step, as well as grief's slow tread.
The sweet, plain words we learned at first keep time;
And though the theme be sad, or gay, or grand,
With each, with all, these may be made to chime,
In thought, or speech, or song, in prose or rhyme."

CHAPTER V.

WORDS WITHOUT MEANING.

POLONIUS. What do you read, my Lord?
HAMLET. Words, words, words.—SHAKESPEARE.

Is not cant the *materia prima* of the Devil, from which all falsehoods, imbecilities, abominations, body themselves; from which no true thing can come? For cant is itself properly a double-distilled lie; the second power of a lie.—CARLYLE.

Mankind are fond of inventing certain solemn and sounding expressions which appear to convey much, and in reality mean little; words that are the proxies of absent thoughts, and, like other proxies, add nothing to argument, while they turn the scales of decision.—SHELLEY.

SOME years ago the author of the "Biographical History of Philosophy," in a criticism of a certain public lecturer in London, observed that one of his most marked qualities was the priceless one of frankness. "He accepts no sham. He pretends to admire nothing he does not in his soul admire. He pretends to *be* nothing that he *is* not. Beethoven bores him, and he says so: how many are as wearied as he, but dare not confess it? Oh, if men would but recognize the virtue of intrepidity! If men would but cease lying in traditionary formulas,—pretending to admire, pretending to believe, and all in sheer respectability!"

Who does not admire the quality here commended, and yet what quality, in this age of self-assertion, of sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, is more rare? What an amount of insincerity there is in human speech! In how few persons is the tongue an index to the heart! What a meaningless conventionality pervades all the forms of

social intercourse! Everybody knows that "How d'ye do?" and "Good morning!" are parroted in most cases without a thought of their meaning, or at least, without any positive interest in the health or prosperity of the person addressed; we begin a letter to one whom we secretly detest with "My dear sir," and at the end subscribe ourselves his "obedient servant," though we should resent a single word from him which implied a belief in our sincerity, or bore the slightest appearance of a command. But not to dwell upon these phrases, the hollowness of which may be excused on the ground that they sweeten human intercourse, and prevent the roughest men from degenerating into absolute boors, it is yet startling to reflect how large a proportion of human speech is the veriest cant. That men should use words the meaning of which they have never weighed or discriminated, is bad enough; but that they should habitually use words as mere counters or forms, is certainly worse. There is hardly a class, a society, or a relation in which man can be placed toward man, that does not call into play more or less of language without meaning. The "damnable iteration" of the lawyer in a declaration of assault and battery is not more a thing of form than is the asseveration of one petitioner that he "will ever pray," etc., and of another that he "will be a thousand times obliged," if you will grant his request. Who does not know to what an amount of flummery the most trifling kindness done by one person to another often gives occasion on both sides? The one racks the vocabulary for words and phrases in which to express his pretended gratitude, while, in fact, he is only keenly humiliated by having to accept a favor, and the other as eloquently dis-

claims any merit in the grant, which he really grudged, and will never think of without feeling that he made a great sacrifice.

The secret feeling of many a "public benefactor," loudly praised by the newspapers, was finely let out by Lord Byron when he sent four thousand pounds to the Greeks, and privately informed a friend that he did not think he could *well get off for less.* How many wedding and other presents, and subscriptions to testimonials and to public enterprises, are made by those who secretly curse the occasion that exacts them! With the stereotyped "thanks" and "grateful acknowledgments" of the shopkeeper all are familiar, as they are with "the last," the "positively the last," and the "most positively the very last" appearances of the dramatic stars that shine for five hundred or a thousand dollars a night. As nobody is deceived by these phrases, it seems hypercritical to complain of them, and yet one can hardly help sympathizing with the country editor who scolds a celebrated musician because he is now making farewell tours "once a year," whereas formerly he made them "only once in five years." Considering the sameness of shopkeepers' acknowledgments, one cannot help admiring the daring originality of the Dutch commercial house of which the poet Moore tells, that concluded a letter thus: "Sugars are falling more and more every day; not so the respect and esteem with which we are your obedient servants." The cant of public speakers is so familiar to the public that it is looked for as a matter of course. When a man is called on to address a public meeting, it is understood that the apology for his "lack of preparation" to meet the demand so "unexpectedly" made upon him, will

preface the "impromptu" which he has spent weeks in elaborating, as surely as the inevitable "This is so unexpected" prefaces the reply of a maiden to the long-awaited proposal of marriage from her lover.

Literary men are so wont to weigh their words that cant in them seems inexcusable; yet where shall we find more of it than in books, magazines, and newspapers? How many reasons are assigned by authors for inflicting their works on the public, other than the true one, namely, the pleasure of writing, the hope of a little distinction, or of a little money! How many writers profess to welcome criticism, which they nevertheless ascribe to spite, envy, or jealousy, if it is unfavorable! What is intrinsically more deceptive than the multitudinous "WE" in which every writer, great and small, hides his individuality,—whether his object be, as Archdeacon Hare says, "to pass himself off unnoticed, like the Irishman's bad guinea in a handful of halfpence," or to give to the opinions of a humble individual the weight and gravity of a council? "Who the —— is 'We'?" exclaimed the elder Kean on reading a scathing criticism upon his "Hamlet"; and the question might be pertinently asked of many other *nominis umbræ* who deliver their vaticinations and denunciations as oracularly as if they were lineal descendants of Minos or Rhadamanthus. Who can estimate the diminution of power and influence that would result should the ten thousand editors in the land, who now assume a mystic grandeur and speak with a voice of authority, as the organs of the public or a party, come down from their thrones, and exchange the regal "we" for the plebeian and egotistic "I"? "Who is 'I'?" the reader might exclaim, in tones even more contempt-

uous than Kean's. The truth is, "I" is a nobody. He represents only himself. He may be Smith or Jones,—the merest cipher. He may weigh but a hundred pounds, and still less morally and intellectually. He may be diminutive in stature, and in intellect a Tom Thumb. Who cares what such a pygmy thinks? But "we" represents a multitude, an imposing crowd, a mighty assembly, a congress, or a jury of sages; and we all quail before the opinions of the great "we." As a writer has well said: "'We have every reason to believe that beef will rise to starvation prices' is a sentiment which, when read in a newspaper, will make the stoutest stomach tremble; but substitute an 'I' for the 'we,' and nobody cares a copper for the opinion. It has been well said that what terrified Belshazzar was the hand on the wall, because he couldn't see to whom it belonged; and the same may be said of the editorial 'we.' It is the mystery in which it is involved that invests it with potency."

The history of literature abounds with examples of words used almost without meaning by whole classes of writers. There is a time in the history of almost every literature when language apparently loses its vitality, and becomes dead, by being divorced from the living thought that created it. Many of the most effete and worn-out forms of expression, when first introduced, pleased by their novelty, and manifested originality in their inventors; but by dint of continual repetition, the delicate bloom has been rubbed off, and they have lost their power. A great deal of what is preserved in books, and is called fine writing, is made up of these lifeless parts of language, which are like the elements of a decayed and rotten tree, of which the organic form and

structure are perfect, but the life of which has departed. It is the outward form of literature without the soul; an abundance of fine writing, but no ideas. It has been truly said that it is amazing to see how much of this dead material is accumulated at the present day; whole books filled to repletion with words without thoughts, standing like dead forests, upright indeed, and regular in form and structure, but presenting no fruit nor verdure, sheltering no life, monuments only of past vitality, and soon to crumble into oblivion. "Wandering through these catacombs of the mind, one meets everywhere with the most admirable 'styles,' which, doubtless, when first constructed, were the vehicles of as admirable thought, the fit language of great and stately minds, but which, transported from the past, and made to represent the little and despicable 'notions' of their plunderers, become a very mockery."

Who does not know how feeble and hollow British poetry had become in the eighteenth century, just before the appearance of Cowper? Compelled to appear in the costume of the court, it had acquired its artificiality; and dealing with the conventional manners and outside aspects of men, it had almost forsaken the human heart, the proper haunt and main region of song. Instead of being the vehicle of lofty and noble sentiments, it had degenerated into a mere trick of art,—a hand-organ operation, in which one man could grind out tunes nearly as well as another. A certain monotonous smoothness, a perpetually recurring assortment of images, had become so much the traditional property of the versifiers, that one could set himself up in the business as a shopkeeper might supply himself with his stock in trade. The style that prevailed

has been aptly termed by the poet Lowell "the Dick Swiveller style." As Dick always called the wine "rosy," sleep "balmy," so did these correct gentlemen always employ a glib epithet or a diffuse periphrasis to express the commonest ideas. The sun was never called by his plain, almanac name, but always "Phœbus," or "the orb of day." The moon was known only as "Cynthia," "Diana," or "the refulgent lamp of night." Naïads were as plenty in every stream as trout or pickerel. If these poets wished to say tea, they would write

"Of China's herb the infusion hot and mild."

Coffee would be nothing less than

"The fragrant juice of Mocha's kernel gray."

A boot would be raised to

"The shining leather that the leg encased."

A wig was "Alecto's snaky tresses"; a person traversing St. Giles was "Theseus threading the labyrinth of Crete"; and a magistrate sitting in judgment was nothing less than "Minos" or "Rhadamanthus." If a poet wished to speak of a young man's falling in love, he set himself to relate how Cupid laid himself in ambush in the lady's eye, and from that fortress shot forth a dart at the breast of the unhappy youth, who straightway began to writhe under his wound, and found no ease till the lady was pleased to smile upon him. All women in that golden age were "nymphs"; "dryads" were as common as birds; carriages were "harnessed pomps"; houses, humble or stately "piles"; and not a wind could blow, whether the sweet South, or "Boreas, Cecias, or Argestes loud," but it was "a gentle zephyr." Pope satirized this conventional language in the well known lines:

"While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
With sure returns of still expected rhymes,
Where'er you find 'the cooling western breeze,'
In the next line 'it whispers through the trees';
If crystal streams 'with pleasing murmurs creep,'
The reader's threatened, not in vain, with 'sleep.'"

Yet Pope himself was addicted to these circumlocutions and to threadbare mythological allusions, quite as much as the small wits whom he ridiculed. The manly genius of Cowper broke through these traditionary fetters, and relieved poetry from the spell in which Pope and his imitators had bound its phraseology and rhythm. Expressing his contempt for the "creamy smoothness" of such verse, in which sentiment was so often

"Sacrificed to sound,
And truth cut short to make a period round,"

he cried:

Give *me* the line that ploughs its stately course,
Like a proud swan, conquering the stream by force;
That, like some cottage beauty, strikes the heart,
Quite unindebted to the tricks of art."

The charm of Cowper's letters, acknowledged by all competent judges to be the best in the English language, lies in the simplicity and naturalness,—the freedom from affectation,—by which they are uniformly characterized. Contrasting them with those of Wilberforce, Dr. Andrew Combe observes in a letter to a friend: "Cowper's letters, to my mind, do far more to excite a deep sense of religion, than all the labored efforts of Wilberforce. The one gives expression simply and naturally to the thoughts and feelings which spring up spontaneously as he writes. The other *forces in the one topic in all his letters*, and lashes himself up to a due fervor of expression, whether the mind wills or not. On one occasion Wilberforce dispatched a

very hurried letter on Saturday night, without any religious expressions in it. In the night-time his conscience troubled him so much for the omission, that he could not rest till he sat down next morning and wrote a second with the piety, and apologizing for his involuntary departure from his rule! Only think what a perversion of a good principle this was!"

It is in the conduct of political affairs that the class of words of which we have spoken are used most frequently. Sir Henry Wotton long since defined an ambassador as "a gentleman sent abroad *to lie* for the benefit of his country." In Europe, so indissolubly has diplomacy been associated with trickery, that it is said Talleyrand's wonderful success with the representatives of foreign courts was owing largely to his frankness and fair dealing, nobody believing it possible that he was striving for that for which he seemed to be striving. The plain, open, straightforward way in which he spoke of and dealt with all public matters, completely puzzled the vulgar minds, that could not dissociate from diplomacy the mysterious devices that distinguish the hack from the true diplomatist. In the titles and styles of address used by Kings and Emperors, we have examples of cant in its most meaningless forms. One sovereign is His Most Christian Majesty; another, Defender of the Faith, etc. A monarch, forced by public opinion to issue a commission of inquiry, addresses all the members of it as his "well-beloved," though in his heart he detests them.

Everybody knows that George I of England obtained his crown, not by hereditary title, but by an Act of Parliament; yet, in his very first speech to that body, he had the effrontery to speak of ascending the throne of his ancestors. Well might Henry Luttrell exclaim:

"O that in England there might be
A duty on hypocrisy!
A tax on humbug, an excise
On solemn plausibilities,
A stamp on everything that canted!
No millions more, if these were granted,
Henceforward would be raised or wanted."

So an American politician, who, by caucus-packing, "wire-pulling," and perhaps bribery, has contrived to get elected to a State legislature or to Congress, will publicly thank his fellow-citizens for having sent him there "by their voluntary, unbiased suffrages." When the patriot, Patkul, was surrendered to the vengeance of Charles XII of Sweden, the following sentence was read over to him: "It is hereby made known to be the order of his Majesty, our *most merciful* sovereign, that this man, who is a traitor to his country, be broken on the wheel and quartered," etc. "What mercy!" exclaimed the poor criminal. It was with the same mockery of benevolence that the Holy Inquisition was wont, when condemning a heretic to the torture, to express the tenderest concern for his temporal and eternal welfare. One of the most offensive forms of cant is the profession of extreme humility by men who are full of pride and arrogance. The haughtiest of all the Roman Pontiffs styled himself "the servant of the servants of God," at the very time when he humiliated the Emperor of Germany by making him wait five days barefoot in his ante-chamber in the depth of winter, and expected all the Kings of Europe, when in his presence, to kiss his toe or hold his stirrup. Catherine of Russia was always mouthing the language of piety and benevolence, especially when about to wage war or do some rascally deed. Louis the Fourteenth's paroxysms of repentance and devotion were always the occasion for fresh outrages upon the Huguenots;

and Napoleon was always prating of his love of peace, and of being compelled to fight by his quarrelsome neighbors. While the French revolutionists were shouting "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity!" men were executed in Paris without law and against law, and heads fell by cartloads from the knife of the guillotine. The favorite amusement of Couthon, one of the deadliest of Robespierre's fellow-cutthroats, was the rearing of doves. The contemplation of their innocence, he said, made the charm of his existence, in consoling him for the wickedness of men. Even when he had reached the height of his "bad preëminence" as a terrorist, he was carried to the National Assembly or the Jacobin Club fondling little lapdogs, which he nestled in his bosom. It is told of one of his bloody compatriots, who was as fatal to men and as fond of dogs as himself, that when a distracted wife, who had pleaded to him in vain for her husband's life, in retiring from his presence, chanced to tread on his favorite spaniel's tail, he cried out, "Good heavens, Madam! have you no *humanity?*"

"My children," said Dr. Johnson, "clear your minds of cant." If professional politicians should follow this advice, many of them would be likely to find their occupation clean gone. At elections they are so wont to simulate the sentiments and language of patriotism,—to pretend a zeal for this, an indignation for that, and a horror for another thing, about which they are known to be comparatively indifferent, as if any flummery might be crammed down the throats of the people,—that the voters, whom the old party hacks fancy they are gulling, are simply laughing in their sleeves at their transparent attempts at deception. Daniel O'Connell, the popular Irish orator, is said to have had a large vocabulary of stock political phrases, upon which he

rang the changes with magical effect. He could whine, and wheedle, and wink with one eye, while he wept with the other; and if his flow of oratory was ever in danger of halting, he had always at hand certain stereotyped catch-words, such as his "own green isle," his "Irish heart," his "head upon the block," his "hereditary bondsmen, know ye not," etc., which never failed him in any emergency.

Offensive as are all these forms of speech without meaning, they are not more so than the hollow language of — strange to say, — some moral philosophers. Many persons have been so impressed by the ethical essays of Seneca, in which he sings the praises of poverty, and denounces in burning language the corruption of Rome and the extortion in the provinces, that they could account for the excellence of these writings only on the theory of a Christian influence; and a report gained credit that the Roman philosopher had met and conversed with the Apostle Paul. But what are these brilliant moral discourses? Reading them by the light of the author's life and character, we find they are only words. A late German historian tells us that the same Seneca who could discourse so finely upon the abstemiousness and contentment of the philosopher, and who, on all occasions, paraded his contempt for earthly things as nothingness and vanity, amassed, during the four years of his greatest prosperity and power, a fortune of three hundred millions of sesterces, — over fifteen millions of dollars. While writing his treatise on "Poverty," he had in his house five hundred citrus tables, tables of veined wood brought from Mount Atlas, which sometimes cost as much as twenty-five, and even seventy thousand dollars. The same Seneca, who denounced extortion with so virtuous anger, built his famous museum gardens with the

gold and the tears of Numidia. The same Seneca, who preached so much about purity of morals, was openly accused of adultery with Julia and Agrippina, and led his pupil Nero into still more shameful practices. He wrote a work upon "Clemency," yet had, beyond question, a large part of Nero's atrocities upon his conscience. It was he who composed the letter in which Nero justified before the Senate the murder of his own mother.*

Common, however, as are meaningless phrases on the stump and platform, and even in moral treatises, it is to be feared that they are hardly less so in the meeting-house, and there they are doubly offensive, if not unpardonable. It is a striking remark of Coleridge, that truths, of all others the most awful and interesting, are too often considered so true that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bedridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors. Continual handling wears off the beauty and significance of words, and it is only by a distinct effort of the mind that we can restore their full meaning. Gradually the terms most vital to belief cease to mean what they meant when first used; the electric life goes out of them; and, for all practical purposes, they are dead. Hence it is that "the traditional maxims of old experience, though seldom questioned, have often so little effect on the conduct of life, because their meaning is never, by most persons, really felt, until personal experience has brought it home. And thus, also, it is that so many doctrines of religion, ethics, and even politics, so full of meaning and reality to first converts, have manifested a tendency to degenerate rapidly into lifeless dogmas, which tendency all the efforts of an education

* Ulhorn's "Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism;" pp. 93, 94.

expressly and skilfully directed to keeping the meaning alive are barely found sufficient to counteract."*

There can be little doubt that many a man whose life is thoroughly selfish cheats himself into the belief that he is pious, because he parrots with ease the phrases of piety and orthodoxy. Who is not familiar with scores of such pet phrases and cant terms, which are repeated at this day apparently without a thought of their meaning? Who ever attended a missionary meeting without hearing "the Macedonian cry," and an account of some "little interest," and "fields white for the harvest"? Who is not weary of the ding-dong of "our Zion" and the solecism of "in our midst"; and who does not long for a verbal millennium when Christians shall no longer "feel to take" and "grant to give"? "How much I regret," says Coleridge, "that so many religious persons of the present day think it necessary to adopt a certain cant of manner and phraseology as a token to each other! They must 'improve' this and that text, and they must do so and so in a 'prayerful' way; and so on. A young lady urged upon me, the other day, that such and such feelings were the 'marrow' of all religion; upon which I recommended her to try to walk to London on her marrow bones only." The language of prayer, both public and private, being made up more or less of technical expressions, tends continually to become effete. The scriptural and other phrases, which were used with good taste and judgment several generations ago, may have lost their significance to-day, and should, in that case, be exchanged for others which have a living meaning. Profound convictions, it has been truly said, are imperilled by the continued use

*Mill's "Logic."

of conventional phraseology after the life of it has gone out, so that nothing in the real experience of the people responds to it, when they hear it or when they use it. Mr. Spurgeon, in his "Lectures to Students," remarks that "'the poor unworthy dust' is an epithet generally applied to themselves by the proudest men in the congregation, and not seldom by the most moneyed and grovelling; in which case the last words are not so very inappropriate. We have heard of a good man who, in pleading for his children and grandchildren, was so completely beclouded in the blinding influence of this expression, that he exclaimed, 'O Lord, save thy dust, and thy dust's dust, and thy dust's dust's dust.' When Abraham said, 'I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes,' the utterance was forcible and expressive; but in its misquoted, perverted, and abused form, the sooner it is consigned to its own element the better."

Many persons have very erroneous ideas of what constitutes religious conversation. That is not necessarily religious talk which is interlarded with religious phrases, or which is solely about divine things; but that which is permeated with religious feeling, which is full of truth, reverence, and love, whatever the theme may be. Who has not heard some men talk of the most worldly things in a way that made the hearer feel the electric current of spirituality playing through their words, and uplifting his whole spiritual being? And who has not heard other men talk about the divinest things in so dry, formal, and soulless a way that their words seemed a profanation, and chilled him to the core? It is almost a justification of slang that it is generally an effort to obtain relief from words worn bare by the use of persons who put neither

knowledge nor feeling into them, and which seem incapable of expressing anything real.

When Lady Townsend was asked if Whitefield had recanted, she replied, "No; he has only *canted*." Often, when there is no deliberate hypocrisy, good men use language so exaggerated and unreal as to do more harm than the grossest worldliness. We have often, in thinking upon this subject, called to mind a saying of Dr. Sharp, of Boston, a Baptist preacher, who was a hater of all cant and shams. "There's Dr. ——," said he, about the time of the first meeting of the Evangelical Alliance, "who went all the way to Europe to talk up brotherly love. If he should meet a poor Baptist minister in the street, he wouldn't speak to him." Robert Hall had an intense abhorrence of religious cant, to which he sometimes gave expression in blunt terms. A young preacher who was visiting him spent a day in sighing and in begging pardon for his suspirations, saying that they were caused by grief that he had so hard a heart. The great divine bore with him all the first day, but when the lamentations were resumed the next morning at breakfast, he said: "Why, sir, don't be cast down; remember the compensating principle, and be thankful and still." "Compensating principle!" exclaimed the young man; "what can compensate for a hard heart?" "Why, a soft head, to be sure," said Hall, who, if rude, certainly had great provocation. Nothing is cheaper than pious or benevolent talk. A great many men would be positive forces of goodness in the world, if they did not let all their principles and enthusiasm escape in words. They are like locomotives which let off so much steam through the escape valves, that, though they fill the air with noise, they have not

power enough left to move the train. There is hardly anything which so fritters spiritual energy as talk without deeds. "The fluent boaster is not the man who is steadiest before the enemy; it is well said to him that his courage is better kept till it is wanted. Loud utterances of virtuous indignation against evil from the platform, or in the drawing-room, do not characterize the spiritual giant; so much indignation as is expressed has found vent; it is wasted; is taken away from the work of coping with evil; the man has so much less left. And hence he who restrains that love of talk lays up a fund of spiritual strength."*

"Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng;
They will condense within thy soul,
And change to purpose strong.

But he who lets his feelings run
In soft luxurious flow,
Shrinks when hard service must be done,
And faints at every woe.

Faith's meanest deed more favor bears,
Where hearts and wills are weigh'd,
Than brightest transports, choicest prayers,
Which bloom their hour and fade."†

It is said that Pambos, an illiterate saint of the middle ages, being unable to read, came to some one to be taught a psalm. Having learned the simple verse, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue," he went away, saying that was enough if it was practically acquired. When asked six months, and again many years after, why he did not come to learn another verse, he answered that he had never been able truly to master this. A man may have a heart overflowing with love and sympathy, even though he is not in the habit of

*Sermons, by Rev. F. W. Robertson. †Professor J. H. Newman.

exhibiting on his cards "J. Good Soul, Philanthropist," and was never known to unfold his cambric handkerchief, with the words, "Let us weep." On the other hand, nothing is easier than to use a set phraseology without attaching to it any clear and definite meaning,— to cheat one's self with the semblance of thought or feeling, when no thought or feeling exists. It has been truly said that when good men who have no deep religious fervor use fervent language, which they have caught from others, or which was the natural expression of what they felt in other and better years,— above all, when they employ on mean and trivial occasions expressions which have been forged in the fires of affliction and hammered out in the shock of conflict,— they cannot easily imagine what a disastrous impression they produce on keen and discriminating minds. The cheat is at once detected, and the hasty inference is drawn that all expressions of religious earnestness are affected and artificial. The honest and irrepressible utterance of strong conviction and deep emotion commands respect; but intense words should never be used when the religious life is not intense. "Costing little, words are given prodigally, and sacrificial acts must toil for years to cover the space which a single fervid promise has stretched itself over. No wonder that the slow acts are superseded by the available words, the weighty bullion by the current paper money. If I have conveyed all I feel by language, I am tempted to fancy, by the relief experienced, that feeling has attained its end and realized itself. Farewell, then, to the toil of the 'daily sacrifice!' Devotion has found for itself a vent in words." *

* "Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson."

Art, as well as literature, politics, and religion, has its cant, which is as offensive as any of its other forms. When Rossini was asked why he had ceased attending the opera in Paris, he replied, "I am embarrassed at listening to music with Frenchmen. In Italy or Germany, I am sitting quietly in the pit, and on each side of me is a man shabbily dressed, but who feels the music as I do; in Paris I have on each side of me a fine gentleman in straw-colored gloves, who explains to me all I feel, but who feels nothing. All he says is very clever, indeed, and it is often very true; but it takes the gloss off my own impression,— if I have any."

CHAPTER VI.

SOME ABUSES OF WORDS.

He that hath knowledge spareth his words.—PROVERBS XVII, 27.

Learn the value of a man's words and expressions, and you know him. . . He who has a superlative for everything wants a measure for the great or small.—LAVATER.

Words are women; deeds are men.—GEORGE HERBERT.

He that uses many words for the explaining of any subject, doth, like the cuttle-fish, hide himself for the most part in his own ink.—RAY.

THE old Roman poet Ennius was so proud of knowing three languages that he used to declare that he had three hearts. The Emperor Charles V expressed himself still more strongly, and declared that in proportion to the number of languages a man knows, is he more of a man. According to this theory, Cardinal Mezzofanti, who understood one hundred and fourteen languages, and spoke thirty with rare excellence, must have been many men condensed into one. Of all the human polyglots in ancient or modern times, he had perhaps the greatest knowledge of words. Yet, with all his marvellous linguistic knowledge, he was a mere prodigy or freak of nature, and, it has been well observed, scarcely deserves a higher place in the Pantheon of intellect than a blindfold chess-player or a calculating boy. Talking foreign languages with a fluency and accuracy which caused strangers to mistake him for a compatriot, he attempted no work of utility,—left no trace of his colossal powers; and therefore, in contemplating them, we can but wonder

at his gifts, as we wonder at the Belgian giant or a five-legged lamb. In allusion to his hyperbolical acquisitions, De Quincey suggests that the following would be an appropriate epitaph for his eminence: "Here lies a man who, in the act of dying, committed a robbery,—absconding from his fellow-creatures with a valuable polyglot dictionary." Enormous, however, as were the linguistic acquisitions of Mezzofanti, no man was ever less vain of his acquirements,—priding himself, as he did, less upon his attainments than most persons upon a smattering of a single tongue. "What am I," said he to a visitor, "but an ill-bound dictionary?" The saying of Catherine de Medicis is too often suggested by such prodigies of linguistic acquisition. When told that Scaliger understood twenty different languages,—"That's twenty words for one idea," said she; "I had rather have twenty ideas for one word." In this reply she foreshadowed the great error of modern scholarship, which is too often made the be-all and the end-all of life, when its only relation to it should be that of a graceful handmaid. The story of the scholar who, dying, regretted at the end of his career that he had not concentrated all his energies upon the dative case, only burlesques an actual fact. The educated man is too often one who knows more of *language* than of *idea*,—more of the husk than of the kernel,—more of the vehicle than of the substance it bears. He has got together a heap of symbols,—of mere counters,—with which he feels himself to be an intellectual Rothschild; but of the substance of these shadows, the sterling gold of intellect, coin current throughout the realm, he has not an eagle. All his wealth is in paper,—paper like bad scrip, marked with a high nominal amount, but useless

in exchange, and repudiated in real traffic. The great scholar is often an intellectual miser, who expends the spiritual energy that might make him a hero upon the detection of a wrong dot, a false syllable, or an inaccurate word.

In this country, where fluency of speech is vouchsafed in so large a measure to the people, and every third man is an orator, it is easier to find persons with the twenty words for one idea, than persons with twenty ideas for one word. Of all the peoples on the globe, except perhaps the Irish, Americans are the most spendthrift of language. Not only in our court-houses and representative halls, but everywhere, we are literally deluged with words,— words,— words. Everybody seems born to make long speeches, as the sparks to fly upward. The Aristotelian theory that Nature abhors a vacuum appears to be a universal belief, and all are laboring to fill up the realms of space with "mouthfuls of spoken wind." The quantity of breath that is wasted at our public meetings,— religious, political, philanthropic, and literary,— is incalculable. Hardly a railroad or a canal is opened, but the occasion is seized on as a chance for speeches of "learned length and thundering sound"; and even a new hotel cannot throw open its doors without an amount of breath being expended, sufficient, if economically used, to waft a boat across a small lake.

One is struck, in reading the "thrilling" addresses on various occasions, which are said to have "chained as with hooks of steel the attention of thousands," and which confer on their authors "immortal reputations" that die within a year, to see what tasteless word-piling passes with many for eloquence. The advice given in Racine's

"*Plaideurs*," by an ear-tortured judge to a long-winded lawyer, "to skip to the deluge," might wisely be repeated to our thousand Ciceros and Chathams. The Baconian art of condensation seems nearly obsolete. Many of our orators are forever breaking butterflies on a wheel,—raising an ocean to drown a fly,—loading cannon to shoot at humming-birds. Thought and expression are supplanted by lungs and the dictionary. Instead of great thoughts couched in a few close, home, significant sentences,—the value of a thousand pounds sterling of sense concentrated into a cut and polished diamond,—we have a mass of verbiage, delivered with a pompous elocution. Instead of ideas brought before us, as South expresses it, like water in a well, where you have fulness in a little compass, we have the same "carried out into many petty, creeping rivulets, with length and shallowness together."

It is in our legislative bodies that this evil has reached the highest climax. A member may have a thought or a fact which may settle a question; but if it may be couched in a sentence or two, he thinks it not worth delivering. Unless he can wire-draw it into a two-hours speech, or at least accompany it with some needless verbiage to plump it out in the report, he will sit stock still, and leave the floor to men who have fewer ideas and more words at command. The public mind, too, revolts sometimes against nourishment in highly concentrated forms; it requires bulk as well as nutriment, just as hay, as well as corn, is given to horses, to distend the stomach, and enable it to act with its full powers. Then, again,—and this, perhaps, is one of the main causes of long-winded speeches,—there is a sort of reverence entertained for

a man who can "spout" two or three hours on the stretch; and the wonder is heightened, if he does it without making a fool of himself. Nothing, however, can be more absurd than to regard mere volubility as a proof of intellectual power. So far is this from being the case that it may be doubted whether any large-thoughted man, who was accustomed to grapple with the great problems of life and society, ever found it easy upon the rostrum to deliver his thoughts with fluency and grace.

Bruce, the traveller, long ago remarked of the Abyssinians, that "they are all orators, as," he adds, "are most barbarians." It is often said of such tonguey men that they have "a great command of language," when the simple fact is that language has a great command of them. As Whately says, they have the same command of language that a man has of a horse that runs away with him. A true command of language consists in the power of discrimination, selection, and rejection, rather than in that of multiplication. The greatest orators of ancient and modern times have been remarkable for their economy of words. Demosthenes, when he

> "Shook the arsenal, and fulmined over Greece
> To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne,"

rarely spoke over thirty minutes, and Cicero took even less time to blast Catiline with his lightnings. There are some of the Greek orator's speeches which were spoken, as they may now be read with sufficient slowness and distinctness, in less than half an hour; yet they are the effusions of that rapid and mighty genius the effect of whose words the ancients exhausted their language in describing; which they could adequately describe only

by comparing it to the workings of the most subtle and powerful agents of nature,—the ungovernable torrent, the resistless thunder. Chatham was often briefer still, and Mirabeau, the master-spirit of the French tribune, condensed his thunders into twenty minutes.

It is said that not one of the three leading members of the convention that formed the Constitution of the United States spoke, in the debates upon it, over twenty minutes. Alexander Hamilton was reckoned one of the most diffuse speakers of his day; yet he did not occupy more than two hours and a half in his longest arguments at the bar, nor did his rival, Aaron Burr, occupy over half that time. A judge who was intimately acquainted with Burr and his practice declares that he repeatedly and successfully disposed of cases involving a large amount of property in half an hour. "Indeed," says he, "on one occasion he talked to the jury seven minutes in such a manner that it took me, on the bench, half an hour to straighten them out." He adds: "I once asked him, 'Colonel Burr, why cannot lawyers always save the time, and spare the patience of the court and jury, by dwelling only on the important points in their cases?' to which Burr replied, 'Sir, you demand the greatest faculty of the human mind, selection.'" To these examples we may add that of a great English advocate. "I asked Sir James Scarlett," says Buxton, "what was the secret of his preëminent success as an advocate. He replied that he took care to press home the one principal point of the case, without paying much regard to the others. He also said that he knew the secret of being short. 'I find,' said he, 'that when I exceed half an hour, I am always doing mischief to my client. If I drive into

the heads of the jury unimportant matter, I drive out matter more important that I had previously lodged there.'"

Joubert, a French author, cultivated verbal economy to such an extreme that he tried almost to do without words. "If there is a man on earth," said he, "tormented by the cursed desire to get a whole book into a page, a whole page into a phrase, and this phrase into one word,— that man is myself." The ambition of many American speakers, and not a few writers, is apparently the reverse of this. We do not seem to know that in many cases, as Hesiod says, a half is more than the whole; and that a speech or a treatise hammered out painfully in every part is often of less value than a few bright links, suggestive of the entire chain of thought. Who wants to swallow a whole ox, in order to get at the tenderloin?

Prolixity, it has been well said, is more offensive now than it once was, because men think more rapidly. They are not more thoughtful than their ancestors, but they are more vivid, direct, and animated in their thinking. They are more impatient, therefore, of long-windedness, of a loose arrangement, and of a heavy, dragging movement in the presentation of truth. "A century ago men would listen to speeches and sermons,— to divisions and subdivisions,— that now would be regarded as utterly intolerable. As the human body is whisked through space at the rate of a mile a minute, so the human mind travels with an equally accelerated pace. Mental operations are on straight lines, and are far more rapid than they once were. The public audience now craves a short method, a distinct, sharp statement, and a rapid and accelerating movement, upon the part of its teachers."* It is, in

* Shedd's "Homiletics."

short, an age of steam and electricity that we live in, not of slow coaches; an age of locomotives, electric telegraphs, and phonography; and hence it is the cream of a speaker's thoughts that men want,—the wheat, and not the chaff,—the kernel, and not the shell,—the strong, pungent essence, and not the thin, diluted mixture. The model discourse to-day is that which gives, not all that can be said, even *well* said, on a subject, but the very *apices rerum*, the tops and sums of things reduced to their simplest expression,—the drop of oil extracted from thousands of roses, and condensing all their odors,—the healing power of a hundred weight of bark in a few grains of quinine.

"Certainly the greatest and wisest conceptions that ever issued from the mind of man," says South, "have been couched under, and delivered in, a few close, home, and significant words. . . Was not the work of all the six days [of creation] transacted in so many words? . . . Heaven, and earth, and all the host of both, as it were, dropped from God's mouth, and nature itself was but the product of a word. . . The seven wise men of Greece, so famous for their wisdom all the world over, acquired all that fame, each of them by a single sentence consisting of two or three words. And γνῶθι σεαυτὸν still lives and flourishes in the mouths of all, while many vast volumes are extinct, and sunk into dust and utter oblivion."

Akin to the prolixity of style which weakens so many speeches, is the habitual exaggeration of language which deforms both our public and our private discourse. The most unmanageable of all parts of speech, with many persons, is the adjective. Voltaire has justly said that the adjectives are often the greatest enemies of the substantives, though they may agree in gender, number, and

case. Generally the weakness of a composition is just in proportion to the frequency with which this class of words is introduced. As in gunnery the force of the discharge is proportioned, not to the amount of powder that can be used, but to the amount that can be thoroughly ignited, so it is not the multitude of words, but the exact number fired by the thought, that gives energy to expression. There are some writers and speakers who seem to have forgotten that there are three degrees of comparison. The only adjectives they ever use are the superlative, and even these are raised to the *third power*. With them there is no gradation, no lights and shadows. Every hill is Alpine, every valley Tartarean; every virtue is godlike, every fault a felony; every breeze a tempest, and every molehill a mountain. Praise or blame beggars their vocabulary; epithets are heightened into superlatives; superlatives stretch themselves into hyperboles; and hyperboles themselves get out of breath, and die asthmatically of exhaustion.

Of all the civilized peoples on the face of the globe, our Hibernian friends excepted, Americans are probably the most addicted to this exaggeration of speech. As our mountains, lakes and rivers are all on a gigantic scale, we seem to think our speech must be framed after the same pattern. Even our jokes are of the most stupendous kind; they set one to thinking of the Alleghanies, or suggest the immensity of the prairies. A Western orator, in portraying the most trivial incident, rolls along a Mississippian flood of eloquence, and the vastness of his metaphors makes you think you are living in the age of the megatheriums and saurians, and listening to one of a pre-Adamite race. Our political speeches, instead of being

couched in plain and temperate language, too often bristle

> "With terms unsquared
> Which, from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropped,
> Would seem hyperboles."

In ordinary conversation, such is our enthusiasm or our poverty of expression, that we cannot talk upon the most ordinary themes, except in the most extravagant and enraptured terms. Everything that pleases us is positively "delicious," "nice," or "charming"; everything handsome is "elegant," or "splendid"; everything that we dislike is "hateful," "dreadful," "horrible," or "shocking." Listen to a circle of lively young ladies for a few minutes, and you will learn that, within the compass of a dozen hours, they have met with more marvellous adventures and hair-breadth escapes,— passed through more thrilling experiences, and seen more gorgeous spectacles,— endured more fright, and enjoyed more rapture,— than could be crowded into a whole life-time, even if spun out to threescore and ten.

Ask a person what he thinks of the weather in a rainy season, and he will tell you that "it rains cats and dogs," or that "it beats all the storms since the flood." If his clothes get sprinkled in crossing the street, he has been "drenched to the skin." All our winds blow a hurricane; all our fires are conflagrations,— even though only a hen-coop is burned; all our fogs can be cut with a knife. Nobody fails in this country; he "bursts up." All our orators rival Demosthenes in eloquence; they beat Chillingworth in logic; and their sarcasm is more "withering" than that of Junius himself. Who ever heard of a public meeting in this country that was not "an immense

demonstration"; of an actor's benefit at which the house was not "crowded from pit to dome"; of a political nomination that was not "sweeping the country like wild-fire"? Where is the rich man who does not "roll in wealth"; or the poor man who is "worth the first red cent"? All our good men are paragons of virtue,— our villains, monsters of iniquity.

Many of our public speakers seem incapable of expressing themselves in a plain, calm, truthful manner on any subject whatever. A great deal of our writing, too, is pitched on an unnatural, falsetto key. Quiet ease of style, like that of Cowley's "Essays," Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield," or White's "Natural History of Selborne," is almost a lost art. Our newspaper literature is becoming more and more sensational; and it seems sometimes as if it would come to consist of head-lines and exclamation points. Some of the most popular correspondents are those whose communications are a perfect *florilegium* of fine words. They rival the "tulipomania" in their love of gaudy and glaring colors, and apparently care little how trite or feeble their thoughts may be, provided they have dragon-wings, all green and gold. It was said of Rufus Choate, whose brain teemed with a marvellous wealth of words, and who was very prodigal of adjectives, that he "drove a substantive-and-six" whenever he spoke in public, and that he would be as pathetic as the grand lamentations in "Samson Agonistes" on the obstruction of fish-ways, and rise to the cathedral music of the universe on the right to manufacture India-rubber suspenders. When Chief-Justice Shaw, before whom he had often pleaded, heard that there was a new edition of "Worcester's Dictionary," containing two thousand five hundred new words,

he exclaimed, "For heaven's sake, don't let Choate get hold of it!"*

Even scientific writers, who might be expected to aim at some exactness, often caricature truth with equal grossness, describing microscopic things by colossal metaphors. Thus a French naturalist represents the blood of a louse as "rushing through his veins like a torrent!" Even in treating on this very subject of exaggeration, a writer in an English periodical, after rebuking sharply this *American* fault, himself outrages truth by declaring that "he would walk fifty miles on foot to see the man that never caricatures the subject on which he speaks!" To a critic who thus fails to reck his own rede, one may say with Sir Thomas Browne: "Thou who so hotly disclaimest the devil, be not thyself guilty of diabolism."

Seriously, when shall we have done with this habit of amplification and exaggeration,— of blowing up molehills into Himalayas and Chimborazos? Can anything be more obvious than the dangers of such a practice? Is it not evident that by applying super-superlatives to things petty or commonplace, we must exhaust our vocabulary, so that, when a really great thing is to be described, we shall be bankrupt of adjectives? It is true there is no more unpardonable sin than dulness; but, to avoid being drowsy, it is not necessary that our "good Homers" should be always electrifying us with a savage intensity of expression. There is nothing of which a reader tires so soon as of a continual blaze of brilliant periods,— a style in which a "*qu'il mourut*" and a "let there be light" are crowded

* Perhaps Choate justified himself by the authority of Burke, who sometimes harnessed five adjectives to a noun; *e.g.*, in his diatribe against the metaphysicians, he says: "Their hearts are like that of the principal of evil himself,— incorporeal, pure, unmixed, dephlegmated, defecated evil."

into every line. On the other hand, there is nothing which adds so much to the beauty of style as contrast. Where all men are giants, there are no giants; where all is emphatic in style, there is no emphasis. Travel a few months among the mountains, and you will grow as sick of the everlasting monotony of grandeur, of beetling cliffs and yawning chasms, as of an eternal succession of plains. Yet, in defiance of this obvious truth, the sensational writer thinks the reader will deem him dull unless every sentence blazes with meaning, and every paragraph is crammed with power. His intellect is always armed cap-a-pie, and every passage is an approved attitude of mental carte and tierce. If he were able to create a world, there would probably be no latent heat in it, and no twilight; and should he drop his pen and turn painter, his pictures would be all foreground, with no more perspective than those of the Chinese.

De Quincey, speaking of the excitability of the French, says that, having appropriated all the phrases of passion to the service of trivial and ordinary life, they have no language of passion for the service of poetry, or of occasions really demanding it, because it has been already enfeebled by continual association with cases of an unimpassioned order. "Ah, Heavens!" or "O my God!" are exclamations so exclusively reserved by the English for cases of profound interest that, on hearing a woman even utter such words, they look round expecting to see her child in some situation of danger. But in France "*Ciel!*" and "*O mon Dieu!*" are uttered by every woman if a mouse does but run across the floor. There is much suggestive truth in this. By the habitual use of strong language men may blunt and petrify their feelings, as

surely as by the excessive use of alcoholic stimulants they may deaden the sensibility of the palate. "Naturally the strongest word ought to be used to give expression to the strongest feeling. But strong words have been so blunted through frequent use that they have lost their sharp edge, and pass over our thick skin without even pricking our sensibility; while, at moments when we expect a heavy blow, the light tickling of the socially polite feather may far more vividly stimulate our sensibility."

It is a law of oratory, and indeed of all discourse, whether oral or written, that it is the subdued expression of conviction and feeling, when the speaker or writer, instead of giving vent to his emotions, veils them in part, and suffers only glimpses of them to be seen, that is the most powerful. It is the man who is all *but* mastered by his excitement, but who, at the very point of being mastered, masters himself,— apparently cool when he is at a white heat,— whose eloquence is most conquering. When the speaker, using a gentler mode of expression than the case might warrant, appears to stifle his feelings and studiously to keep them within bounds, a reaction is produced in the hearer's mind, and, rushing into the opposite extreme, he is moved more deeply than by the most vehement and passionate declamation. The jets of flame that escape now and then,— the suppressed bursts of feeling,— the partial eruptions of passion,— are regarded as but hints or faint intimations of the volcano within. Balzac, in one of his tales, tells of an artist, who, by a few touches of his pencil, could give to a most commonplace scene an air of overpowering horror, and throw over the most ordinary and prosaic objects a spectral air of crime and blood. Through a half-opened door you see a

bed with the clothes confusedly heaped, as in some death-struggle, over an undefined object which fancy whispers must be a bleeding corpse; on the floor you see a slipper, an upset candlestick, and a knife perhaps; and these hints tell the story of blood more significantly and more powerfully than the most elaborate detail, because the imagination of man is more powerful than art itself. So with Hood's description of the Haunted House:—

> "Over all there hung a cloud of fear;
> A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
> And said, as plain as whisper to the ear,
> 'The place is haunted!'"

Thoreau, describing an interview he had at Concord with John Brown, notices as one of the latter's marked peculiarities, that he did not overstate anything, but spoke within bounds. "He referred to what his family had suffered in Kansas, without ever giving the least vent to his pent-up fire. *It was a volcano with an ordinary chimney-flue.*" In one of the published letters of the late Rev. F. W. Robertson, there are some admirable comments on a letter, full of strongly expressed religious sentiments, pious resolutions, etc., which he had received from a fashionable lady. The letter, he says, "is in earnest so far as it goes; only *that fatal facility of strong words* expresses feeling which will seek for itself no other expression. She believes or means what she says, but the very vehemence of the expression injures her, for really it expresses the penitence of a St. Peter, and would not be below the mark if it were meant to describe the bitter tears with which he bewailed his crime; but when such language is used for trifles, there remains *nothing stronger for the awful crises of human life.* It is like

Draco's code,—death for larceny; and there remains for parricide or treason only death."

Let us then be as chary of our superlatives as of our Sunday suit. Hardly a greater mistake can be made in regard to expression, than to suppose that a uniform intensity of style is a proof of mental power. So far is this from being true, that it may safely be said that such intensity not only implies a want of truthfulness and simplicity, but even of earnestness and real force. Intensity is not a characteristic of nature, in spirit or in matter. The surface of the earth is not made up of mountains and valleys, but, for the most part, of gentle undulations. The ocean is not always in a rage, but, if not calm, its waves rise and fall with gentle fluctuation. Hurricanes and tempests are the extraordinary, not the usual, conditions of our atmosphere. Not only the strongest thinkers, but the most powerful orators, have been distinguished rather for moderation than for exaggeration in expression. The great secret of Daniel Webster's strength as a speaker lay in the fact that he made it a practice to understate rather than to overstate his confidence in the force of his own arguments, and in the logical necessity of his conclusions. The sober and solid tramp of his style reflected the movements of an intellect that palpably respected the relations and dimensions of things, and to which exaggeration would have been an immorality. Holding that violence of language is evidence of feebleness of thought and lack of reasoning power, he kept his auditor constantly in advance of him, by suggestion rather than by strong asseveration, and by calmly stating the facts that *ought* to move the hearer, instead of by making passionate appeals, the man being always felt to be greater than the man's

feelings. Such has been the method of all great rhetoricians of ancient and modern times.

The most effective speakers are not those who tell all they think or feel, but those who, by maintaining an austere conscientiousness of phrase, leave on their hearers the impression of reserved power. Great bastions of military strength must lie at rest in times of peace, that they may be able to execute their destructive agencies in times of war; and so let it be with the superlatives of our tongue. Never call on the "tenth legion," or "the old guard," except on occasions corresponding to the dignity and weight of those tremendous forces. Say plain things in a plain way, and then, when you have occasion to send a sharp arrow at your enemy, you will not find your quiver empty of shafts which you wasted before they were wanted.

"You should not speak to think, nor think to speak;
But words and thoughts should of themselves outwell
From inner fulness; chest and heart should swell
To give them birth. Better be dumb a week
Than idly prattle; better in leisure sleek
Lie fallow-minded, than a brain compel
To wasting plenty that hath yielded well,
Or strive to crop a soil too thin and bleak.
One true thought, from the deepest heart upspringing,
May from within a whole life fertilize:
One true word, like the lightning sudden gleaming,
May rend the night of a whole world of lies.
Much speech, much thought, may often be but seeming,
But in one truth might boundless ever lies."

CHAPTER VII.

SAXON WORDS, OR ROMANIC?

I cannot admire the constant use of French or Latin words, instead of your own vernacular. My Anglo-Saxon feelings are wounded to the quick . . . by such words as *chagrin* instead of "grief," *malediction* instead of "curse," etc.—COUNT DE MONTALEMBERT, in letter to Mrs. Oliphant.

The devil does not care for your dialectics and eclectic homiletics, or Germanic objectives and subjectives; but pelt him with Anglo-Saxon in the name of God, and he will shift his quarters.—REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

> Words have their proper places, just like men;
> We listen to, not venture to reprove,
> Large language swelling under gilded domes,
> Byzantine, Syrian, Persepolitan.—LANDOR.

IT is a question of deep interest to all public speakers and writers, and one which has provoked not a little discussion of late years, whether the Saxon or the Romanic part of our language should be preferred by those who would employ "the Queen's English" with potency and effect. Of late it has been the fashion to cry up the native element at the expense of the foreign; and among the champions of the former we may name Dr. Whewell, of Cambridge, and a modern rector of the University of Glasgow, whom De Quincey censures for an erroneous direction to the students to that effect. We may also add Lord Stanley,—one of the most brilliant and polished speakers in the British Parliament,—who, in an address some years ago to the students of the same university, after expressing his surprise that so few persons, comparatively, in Great Britain, have acquainted themselves with the origin, the history, and the gradual

development of that mother tongue which is already spoken over half the world, which is destined to yet further geographical extension, and which embodies many of the noblest thoughts that have ever issued from the brain of man,—adds: "Depend upon it, it is the plain Saxon phrase, not the term borrowed from Greek or Roman literature, that, whether in speech or writing, goes straightest and strongest to men's heads and hearts." On the other hand "the Opium-Eater," commenting on a remark of Coleridge that Wordsworth's "Excursion" bristles beyond most poems with polysyllabic words of Greek or Latin origin, asserts that so must it ever be in meditative poetry upon solemn, philosophic themes. The gamut of ideas needs a corresponding gamut of expressions; the scale of the thinking, which ranges through every key, exacts for the artist an unlimited command over the entire scale of the instrument he employs.

It has been computed, he adds, that the Italian opera has not above six hundred words in its whole vocabulary; so narrow is the range of its emotions, and so little are those emotions disposed to expand themselves into any variety of thinking. The same remark applies to that class of simple, household, homely passion, which belongs to the early ballad poetry. "Pass from these narrow fields of the intellect, where the relations of the objects are so few and simple, and the whole prospect so bounded, to the immeasurable and sea-like arena upon which Shakespeare careers,—co-infinite with life itself,—yes, and with something more than life. Here is the other pole, the opposite extreme. And what is the choice of diction? What is the *lexis?* Is it Saxon exclusively, or is it Saxon by preference? So far from that, the Latinity

is intense,—not, indeed, in his construction, but in his choice of words; and so continually are these Latin words used, with a critical respect to their earliest (and where *that* happens to have existed, to their unfigurative) meaning, that, upon this one argument I would rely for upsetting the else impregnable thesis of Dr. Farmer as to Shakespeare's learning. . . These 'dictionary' words are indispensable to a writer, not only in the proportion by which he transcends other writers as to extent and as to subtlety of thinking, but also as to elevation and sublimity. Milton was not an extensive or discursive thinker, as Shakespeare was; for the motions of his mind were slow, solemn, sequacious, like those of the planets; not agile and assimilative; not attracting all things into its sphere; not multiform; repulsion was the law of his intellect,—he moved in solitary grandeur. Yet, merely from this quality of grandeur,—unapproachable grandeur,—his intellect demanded a larger infusion of Latinity into his diction." De Quincey concludes, therefore, that the true scholar will manifest a partiality for neither part of the language, but will be governed in his choice of words by the theme he is handling.

This we believe to be the true answer to the question. The English language has a special dowry of power in its double-headed origin: the Saxon part of the language fulfils one set of functions; the Latin, another. Neither is good or bad absolutely, but only in its relation to its subject, and according to the treatment which the subject is meant to receive. The Saxon has nerve, terseness, and simplicity; it smacks of life and experience, and "puts small and convenient handles to things,—handles that are easy to grasp;" but it has neither height nor breadth

for every theme. To confine ourselves to it would be, therefore, a most egregious error. The truth is, it is no one element which constitutes the power and efficiency of our noble and expressive tongue, but the great multitude and the rich variety of the elements which enter into its composition. Its architectural order is neither Doric, Ionic, nor Corinthian, but essentially composite; a splendid mosaic, to the formation of which many ancient and modern languages have contributed; defective in unity and symmetrical grace of proportion, but of vast resources and of immense power. With such a wealth of words at our command, to confine ourselves to the pithy but limited Saxon, or to employ it chiefly, would be to practise a foolish economy,— to be poor in the midst of plenty, like the miser amid his money bags. All experiments of this kind will fail as truly, if not as signally, as that of Charles James Fox, who, an intense admirer of the Saxon, attempted to portray in that dialect the revolution of 1688, and produced a book which his warmest admirers admitted to be meagre, dry, and spiritless,— without picturesqueness, color, or cadence.

It is true that within a certain limited and narrow circle of ideas, we can get along with Saxon words very well. The loftiest poetry, the most fervent devotion, even the most earnest and impassioned oratory, may all be expressed in words almost purely Teutonic; but the moment we come to the abstract and the technical,— to discussion and speculation,— we cannot stir a step without drawing on foreign sources. Simple narrative,— a pathos resting upon artless circumstances,— elementary feelings,— homely and household affections,— these are all most happily expressed by the old Saxon vocabulary; but

a passion which rises into grandeur, which is complex, elaborate, and interveined with high meditative feelings, would languish or absolutely halt, without aid from the Romanic part of the vocabulary. If Anglo-Saxon is the framework or skeleton of our language, the spine on which the structure of our speech is hung,—if it is the indispensable medium of familiar converse and the business of life,—it no more fills out the full and rounded outline of our language, than the skeleton, nerves, and sinews form the whole of the human body. It is the classical contributions, the hundreds and thousands of Romanic words which during and since the sixteenth century have found a home in our English speech, that have furnished its spiritual conceptions, and endowed the material body with a living soul.

These words would never have been adopted, had they not been absolutely necessary to express new modes and combinations of thought. As children of softer climes and gentler aspect than our harsh but pithy Teutonic terms, they have been received into the English family of words, and add grace and elegance to the speech that has adopted them. The language has gained immensely by the infusion, not only in richness of synonym and the power of expressing nice shades of thought and feeling, but, more than all, in light-footed polysyllables that trip singing to the music of verse. If the saying of Shakespeare, that

"The learned pate ducks to the golden fool,"

is more expressive than it would be if couched in Latin words, would not the fine thought that

"Nice customs courtesy to kings,"

be greatly injured by substituting any other words for

"nice" and "courtesy"? Because Shakespeare's "oak-cleaving thunderbolts" is so admirable, shall we fail to appreciate Milton's "fulmined over Greece," where the idea of flash and reverberation is conveyed, without that of riving and shattering? It has been observed that Wordsworth's famous ode, "Intimations of Immortality," translated into "Hints of Deathlessness," would hiss like an angry gander. Instead of Shakespeare's

> "Age cannot wither her,
> Nor custom stale her infinite variety,"

say "her boundless manifoldness," and would not the sentiment suffer in exact proportion with the music? With what terms equally expressive would you supply the place of such words as the long ones blended with the short in the exclamation of the horror-stricken Macbeth?—

> "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No! this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous sea incarnadine,
> Making the green one red."

As the poet Lowell justly asks, could anything be more expressive than the huddling epithet which here implies the tempest-tossed soul of the speaker, and at the same time pictures the wallowing waste of ocean more vividly than does Æschylus its rippling sunshine? "'Multitudinous sea,'—what an expression! You feel the wide weltering waste of confused and tumbling waves around you in that single word. What beauty and wealth of color too in 'incarnadine,' a word capable of dyeing an ocean! and then, after these grand polysyllables, how terse and stern comes in the solid Saxon, as if a vast cloud had condensed into great heavy drops,—the deep one red."* Is it not plain that if you substitute any less massive words for the

*W. W. Story.

sesquipedalia verba, the sonorous terms "multitudinous" and "incarnadine," the whole grandeur of the passage would collapse at once?

Among the British orators of this century few have had a greater command of language, or used it with nicer discrimination, than Canning. What can be happier than the blending of the native and the foreign elements in the following eloquent passage? Most of the italicized words are Saxon:

"Our present repose is no more a proof of our inability to act than the state of inertness and inactivity in which I have seen *those mighty masses that float in the waters above your town* is a proof that they are devoid of strength or incapable of being fitted for action. You well know, gentlemen, how soon one of those stupendous *masses now reposing on their shadows in perfect stillness* — how soon, upon any call of patriotism or of necessity, it would assume *the likeness of an animated thing, instinct with life and motion* — how soon it *would ruffle*, as it were, *its swelling plumage — how quickly it would put forth all its beauty and its bravery, collect its scattered* elements *of strength, and awake its dormant thunders.* Such as is one of those magnificent machines when springing from inaction into a display of its strength, such is England itself, while, apparently passive and motionless, she silently causes her power to be put forth on an adequate occasion."

In the famous passage in Sterne's "Tristram Shandy," which has been pronounced the most musical in our language, nearly all the words are Saxon:

"The accusing spirit that flew up to Heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in, and the recording angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out forever."

On the other hand, in the following passage from Napier's history of the Peninsular War,— in which the impetuosity of the style almost rivals that of the soldiers it describes, and in reading which we seem almost to hear the tramp and the shouts of the charging squadrons, and the sharp rattle of the musketry,— how indispensable to the effect of the description are the Romance words, which we have italicized:

"Suddenly and sternly *recovering*, they closed on their *terrible* enemies; and then was seen with what a strength and *majesty* the British *soldier* fights. In vain did Soult, by *voice* and gesture, *animate* his Frenchmen; in vain did the hardiest *veterans*, *extricating* themselves from the crowded *columns*, *sacrifice* their lives to gain time for the mass to open out on such a fair field; in vain did the mass itself bear up, and, fiercely striving, fire *indiscriminately* upon friends and foes, while the horsemen hovering on the *flank* threatened to *charge* the *advancing* line. Nothing could stop that *astonishing infantry*; no sudden burst of *undisciplined valor*, no nervous *enthusiasm*, weakened the *stability* of their *order*; their flashing eyes were bent on the dark *columns* in their *front*; their *measured* tread shook the ground; their dreadful *volleys* swept away the head of every *formation*; their deafening shouts overpowered the *different cries* that broke from all *parts* of the *tumultuous* crowd, as, foot by foot, and with a *horrid carnage*, it was driven by the *incessant vigor* of the *attack* to the furthest edge of the hill. In vain did the French *reserves*, joining with the struggling *multitudes*, *endeavor to sustain* the fight; their *efforts* only *increased* the *irremediable confusion*, and the mighty mass, giving way like a loosened cliff, went headlong down the *ascent*. The rain poured after in streams *discolored* with blood, and fifteen hundred unwounded men, the *remnant* of six thousand *unconquerable* British *soldiers*, stood *triumphant* on the *fatal* field."

It is true, as we have already said, that the Saxon has the advantage of being the aboriginal element, the basis, and not the superstructure, of the language; it is the dialect of the nursery, and its words therefore, being consecrated to the feelings by early use, are full of secret suggestions and echoes, which greatly multiply their power. Its words, though not intrinsically, yet to us, from association, are more concrete and pictorial than those derived from the Latin; and this is particularly true of many beautiful words we have lost. How much more expressive to us is "sea-robber" than "pirate"; "sand-waste" than "desert"; "eye-bite" than "fascinate"; "mill-race" than "channel"; "water-fright" than "hydrophobia"; "moonling" than "lunatic"; "show-holiness" than "hypocrisy"; "in-wit" than "conscience"; "gold-hoard" than "treasure"; "ship-craft" than "the art of navigation"; "hand-cloth" than "towel"; "book-craft" than "literature"! Therefore, as De Quincey says, "wherever the passion of a poem is of that sort which *uses*, *presumes*, *or postulates* the

ideas, without seeking to extend them, Saxon will be the 'cocoon' (to speak by the language applied to silk-worms), which the poem spins for itself. But on the other hand, where the motion of the feeling is *by* and *through* the ideas, where (as in religious or meditative poetry,— Young's, for instance, or Cowper's) the pathos creeps and kindles underneath the very tissues of the thinking,—there the Latin will predominate; and so much so that, while the flesh, the blood, and the muscle will be often almost exclusively Latin, the articulations only, or hinges of connection, will be Anglo-Saxon."

Let us be thankful, then, that our language has other elements than the Saxon, admirable as that is. The circumstances under which this element had its origin were such as to impart strength rather than beauty or elegance. The language of our continental forefathers was the language of fierce barbarians, hemmed in by other barbarous tribes, and having no intercourse with foreign nations, except when roving as sea wolves to plunder and destroy. It was the speech of a taciturn people living only in gloomy forests and on stormy seas, and was naturally, therefore, harsh and monosyllabic. It was full, nevertheless, of pithy, bold, and vigorous expressions, and needed only that its hardy stock should receive the grafts of sunnier and softer climes, to bear abundant and beautiful fruit. Let us be thankful that this union took place. Let us be grateful for that inheritance of collateral wealth, which, by engrafting our Anglo-Saxon stem with the mixed dialect of Normandy, caused ultimately the whole opulence of Roman, and even of Grecian thought, to play freely through the veins of our native tongue. No doubt the immediate result was anything but pleasant. For a long time after the language

was thrown again into the crucible, Britons, Saxons and Normans talked a jargon fit neither for gods nor men. It was a chaos of language, hissing, sputtering, bubbling like a witch's caldron. But luckily the Saxon element was yet plastic and unfrozen, so that the new elements could fuse with its own, thus forming that wondrous instrument of expression which we now enjoy, fitted fully to reflect the thoughts of the myriad-minded Shakespeare, yet, at the same time, with enough remaining of its old forest stamina for imparting a masculine depth to the sublimities of Milton or the Hebrew prophets, and to the Historic Scriptures that patriarchal simplicity which is one of their greatest charms.

We are aware that, in reply to all this, it may be asked, "Are not ninety-three words out of every hundred in the Bible Anglo-Saxon; and where are the life, beauty and freshness of our language to be found in so heaped a measure as in that 'pure well of English,' the Bible?" Nothing can be plainer or simpler than its vocabulary, yet how rich is it in all that concerns the moral, the spiritual, and even the intellectual interests of humanity! Is it logic that we ask? What a range of abstract thought, what an armory of dialectic weapons, what an enginery of vocal implements for moving the soul, do we find in the epistles of St. Paul! Is it rhetoric that we require? "Where," in the language of South, "do we find such a natural prevailing pathos as in the lamentations of Jeremiah? One would think that every letter was written with a tear, every word was the noise of a breaking heart; that the author was a man compacted of sorrow, disciplined to grief from his infancy, one who never breathed but in sighs, nor spoke but in a groan."

Yet, while our translation owes much of its beauty to the Saxon, there are passages the grandeur of which would be greatly diminished by the substitution of Saxon words for the Latin ones. In the following the Latin words italicized are absolutely necessary to preserve one of the sublimest rhythms of the Bible: "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great *multitude*, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia, for the Lord God *Omnipotent reigneth.*'"

The truth is, the translators of the Bible, while they have employed a large percentage of Saxon words, have hit the golden mean in their version, never hesitating to use a Latin word when the sense or the rhythm demanded it; and hence we have the entire volume of revelation in the happiest form in which human wit and learning have ever made it accessible to man. This an English Catholic writer, a convert from the Anglican church, has mournfully acknowledged, in the following touching passage:—"Who will not say that the uncommon beauty and marvellous English of the Protestant Bible is one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country? It lives on the ear, like a music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities often seem to be almost things rather than mere words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of national seriousness. . . The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of a man is hidden beneath its words. It is the representative of his best moments, and all that there has been about him of soft

and gentle, and pure and penitent and good, speaks to him forever out of his English Bible. It is his sacred thing, which doubt has never dimmed, and controversy never soiled. . . In the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant with one spark of religiousness about him, whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible."*

It is a very striking and suggestive fact that those very writers who award the palm for expressiveness to the Saxon part of our language, cannot extol the Saxon without the help of Latin words. Dr. Gregory tells us that when, in the company of Robert Hall, he chanced to use the term "felicity" three or four times in rather quick succession, the latter asked him: "Why do you say 'felicity'? 'Happiness' is a better word, more musical, and genuine English, coming from the Saxon." "Not more musical," said Dr. Gregory. "Yes, more musical, — and so are all words derived from the Saxon, generally. Listen, sir: 'My heart is smitten, and withered like grass.' There is plaintive music. Listen again, sir: 'Under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.' There is cheerful music." "Yes, but 'rejoice' is French." "True, but all the rest is Saxon; and 'rejoice' is almost out of time with the other words. Listen again: 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.' All Saxon, sir, except 'delivered.' I could think of the word 'tear' till I wept." But whence did Robert Hall get the words "musical" and "plaintive music"? Are they not from the Greek and the French? Is not this stabbing a man with his own weapons? It is a curious fact, that, in spite of this eulogy on Saxon

*F. W. Faber, in "Dublin Review," June, 1853.

words, a more than ordinary percentage of the words used in Mr. Hall's writings are of Romanic origin. Again, even Macaulay, one of the most brilliant and powerful of all English writers, finds it impossible to laud the Saxon part of the language without borrowing nearly half the words of his famous panegyric from the Romanic part of the vocabulary. In his article on Bunyan, in a passage written in studied commendation of the "pure old Saxon" English, we find, omitting the particles and wheelwork, one hundred and twenty-one words, of which fifty-one, or over forty-two per cent, are classical or alien. In other words, this great English writer, than whom few have a more imperial command over all the resources of expression, finds the Saxon insufficient for his eloquent eulogy on Saxon, and is obliged to borrow four-tenths of his words, and those the most emphatic ones, from the imported stock!

It is an important fact, that while we can readily frame a sentence wholly of Anglo-Saxon, we cannot do so with words entirely Latin, because the determinative particles,— the bolts, pins, and hinges of the structure,— must be Saxon. Macaulay, in his famous contrast of Dr. Johnson's conversational language with that of his writings, has vividly illustrated the superiority of a Saxon-English to a highly Latinized diction. "The expressions which came first to his tongue were simple, energetic, and picturesque. When he wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese. 'When we were taken up stairs,' says he in one of his letters from the Hebrides, 'a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one of us was to lie.' This incident is recorded in his published Journey as follows: 'Out of one of the beds on which

we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man as black as a Cyclops from the forge.' Sometimes," Macaulay adds, "Johnson translated aloud. 'The Rehearsal,' he said, 'has not wit enough to keep it sweet;' then, after a pause, 'It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction.'" Doubtless Johnson, like Robertson, Hume, and Gibbon, thought that he was refining the language by straining it through the lees of Latin and Greek, so as to imbue it with the tone and color of the learned tongues, and clear it of the barbarous Saxon; while real purity rather springs from such words as are our own, and peculiar to our fatherland. Nevertheless, the elephantine diction of the Doctor proved, in the end, a positive blessing to the language; for by pushing the artificial or classic system to an extreme, it brought it into disrepute, and led men to cultivate again the native idiom.

In conclusion, to sum up our views of the matter, we would say to every young writer: Give no fantastic preference to either Saxon or Latin, the two great wings on which our magnificent English soars and sings, for you can spare neither. The union of the two gives us an affluence of synonyms and a nicety of discrimination which no homogeneous tongue can boast. To know how to use each in due degree, and on proper occasions,—when to aim at vigor and when at refinement of expression,—to be energetic without coarseness, and polished without affectation,— is the highest proof of a cultivated taste. Never use a Romanic word when a Teutonic one will do as well; for the former carries a comparatively cold and conventional signification to an English ear. Between the sounding Latin and the homely, idiomatic Saxon, there is often as much difference in respect to a power of awaken-

ing associations, as between a gong and a peal of village bells. Pleasant though it be to read the pages of one who writes in a foreign tongue, as it is pleasant to visit distant lands, yet there is always the charm of home, with all its witchery, in the good old Anglo-Saxon of our fathers. Of the words that we heard in our childhood, there are some which have stored up in them an ineffable sweetness and flavor, which make them precious ever after; there are others which are words of might, of power,— old, brawny, large-meaning words, heavily laden with associations,— which, when they strike the imagination, awaken tender and tremulous memories, obscure, subtle, and yet most powerful. The orator and the poet can never employ these terms without great advantage; their very sound is often a spell "to conjure withal." Our language is essentially Teutonic; the whole skeleton of it is thoroughly so; all its grammatical forms, all its most common and necessary words, are still identical with that old mother tongue whose varying forms lived on the lips of Arminius and of Hengest, of Harold of Norway, and of Harold of England, of Alaric, of Alboin, and of Charles the Great. On the other hand, never scruple to use a Romanic word when the Saxon will not do as well; that is, do not over-Teutonize from any archaic pedantry, but use the strongest, the most picturesque, or the most beautiful word, from whatever source it may come. The Latin words, though less home-like, must nevertheless be deemed as truly denizen in the language as the Saxon,— as being no alien interlopers, but possessing the full right of citizenship. Some of them came so early into the language, and are, therefore, so thoroughly naturalized, that we hardly recognize them as foreign words, unless our

attention is particularly called to their origin. When a person speaks of "paying money" or "paying a debt," we are no more sensible of an exotic effect than if he had spoken of "eating bread," "drinking water," or "riding a horse." That "pay" is derived from *pacare*, "debt" from *debitum*, or "money" from (*Juno*) *Moneta*, scarcely suggests itself even to the scholar. Perhaps of all our writers Shakespeare may be deemed, in this matter of the choice of words, the student's best friend. No one better knows how far the Saxon can go, or so often taxes its utmost resources; yet no one better knows its poverty and weakness; and, therefore, while in treating homely and familiar themes he uses simple words, and shows, by his total abstinence from Latin words in some of his most beautiful passages, that he understands the monosyllabic music of our tongue, yet in his loftiest flights it is on the broad pinions of the Roman eagle that he soars, and we shall find, if we regard him closely, that every feather is plucked from its wing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET OF APT WORDS.

Le style c'est de l'homme.— BUFFON.

Altogether the style of a writer is a faithful representative of his mind; therefore if any man wish to write a clear style, let him first be clear in his thoughts: and if he would write in a noble style, let him first possess a noble soul.— GOETHE.

No noble or right style was ever yet founded but out of a sincere heart.— RUSKIN.

IT was a saying of the wily diplomatist, Talleyrand, that language was given to man to conceal his thought. There is a class of writers at the present day who seem to be of the same opinion,— sham philosophers for the most part, who have an ambition to be original without the capacity, and seek to gain the credit of soaring to the clouds by shrouding familiar objects in mist. As all objects look larger in a fog, so their thoughts "loom up through the haze of their style with a sort of dusky magnificence that is mistaken for sublimity." This style of writing is sometimes called "transcendental"; and if by this is meant that it transcends all the established laws of rhetoric, and all ordinary powers of comprehension, the name is certainly a happy one. It is a remark often made touching these shallow-profound authors, "What a pity that So-and-so does not express thoughts so admirable in intelligible English!"— whereas, in fact, but for the strangeness and obscurity of the style, which fills the ear while it famishes the mind, the matter would seem commonplace. The simple truth is, that the profoundest authors are always the

clearest, and the *chiaro-oscuro* which these transcendentalists affect, instead of shrouding thoughts which mankind cannot well afford to lose, is but a cloak for their intellectual nakedness,—the convenient shelter for meagreness of thought and poverty of expression. As the banks and shoals of the sea are the ordinary resting-place of fogs, so is it with thought and language; the cloud almost invariably indicates the shallow.

But, whether language be or be not fitted to *cloak* our ideas, as Talleyrand and Voltaire before him supposed, there are few persons to whom it has not seemed at times inadequate to *express* them. How many ideas occur to us in our daily reflections, which, though we toil after them for hours, baffle all our attempts to seize them and render them comprehensible? Who has not felt, a thousand times, the brushing wings of great thoughts, as, like startled birds, they have swept by him,— thoughts so swift and so many-hued that any attempt to arrest or describe them seemed like mockery? How common it is, after reflecting on some subject in one's study, or a lonely walk, till the whole mind has become heated and filled with the ideas it suggests, to feel a descent into the veriest tameness when attempting to embody those ideas in written or spoken words! A thousand bright images lie scattered in the fancy, but we cannot picture them; glimpses of glorious visions appear to us, but we cannot arrest them; questionable shapes float by us, but, when we question them, they will not answer. Even Byron, one of the greatest masters of eloquent expression, who was able to condense into one word, that fell like a thunderbolt, the power and anguish of emotion, experienced the same difficulty, and tells us in lines of splendid declamation:

"Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me,—could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe,— into one word,
And that one word were lightning, I would speak;
But, as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword."

So, too, that great verbal artist, Tennyson, complains:

"I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel;
For words, like Nature, half reveal,
And half conceal the soul within."

De Quincey truly remarks that all our thoughts have not words corresponding to them in our yet imperfectly developed nature, nor can ever express themselves in acts, but must lie appreciable by God only, like the silent melodies in a great musician's heart, never to roll forth from harp or organ.

"The sea of thought is a boundless sea,
Its brightest gems are not thrown on the beach;
The waves that would tell of the mystery
Die and fall on the shore of speech."

"Thought," says the eloquent Du Ponceau, "is vast as the air; it embraces far more than languages can express; —or rather, languages *express* nothing, they only make thought flash in electric sparks from the speaker to the hearer. A single word creates a crowd of conceptions, which the intellect combines and marshals with lightning-like rapidity."

The Germans have coined a phrase to characterize a class of persons who have conception without expression,— gifted, thoughtful men, lovers of goodness and truth, who have no lack of ideas, but who hesitate and stammer when they would put them into language. Such men they term

men of "passive genius." Their minds are like black glass, absorbing all the rays of light, but unable to give out any for the benefit of others. Jean Paul calls them "the dumb ones of earth," for, like Zacharias, they have visions of high import, but are speechless when they would tell them. The infirmity of these dumb ones, is, however, the infirmity, in a less degree, of all men, even the most fluent; for there are thoughts which mock at all attempts to express them, however "well-languaged" the thinker may be.

It is not true, then, that language is, as Vinet characterizes it, "*la pensée devenue matière*"; for the very expression involves a contradiction. Words are nothing but symbols,—imperfect, too, at best,—and to make the symbol in any way a measure of the thought is to bring down the infinite to the measure of the finite. It is true that our words mean more than it is in their power to express,—shadow forth far more than they can define; yet, when their capacity has been exhausted, there is much which they fail, not only to express, but even to hint. There are abysses of thought which the plummet of language can never fathom. Like the line in mathematics, which continually approaches to a curve, but, though produced forever, does not cut it, language can never be more than an *asymptote* to thought. Expression, even in Shakespeare, has its limits. No power of language enables man to reveal the features of the mystic Isis, on whose statue was inscribed: "I am all which hath been, which is, and shall be, and no mortal hath ever lifted my veil."

"Full oft
Our thoughts drown speech, like to a foaming force
Which thunders down the echo it creates;
Words are like the sea-shells on the shore; they show
Where the mind ends, and not how far it has been."

Notwithstanding all this, however, there is truth in the lines of Boileau:

> "Selon que notre idée est plus ou moins obscure,
> L'expression la suit, ou moins nette, ou plus pure;
> Ce que l'on concoit bien s'énonce clairement,
> Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément."

In spite of the complaints of those who, like the great poets we have quoted, have expressed in language of wondrous force and felicity their feeling of the inadequacy of language, it is doubtless true, as a general thing, that impression and expression are relative ideas; that what we clearly conceive we can clearly convey; and that the failure to embody our thoughts is less the fault of our mother tongue than of our own deficient genius. What the flute or the violin is to the musician, his native language is to the writer. The finest instruments are dumb till those melodies are put into them of which they can be only the passive conductors. The most powerful and most polished language must be wielded by the master before its full force can be known. The Philippics of Demosthenes were pronounced in the mother tongue of every one of his audience; but "who among them could have answered him in a single sentence like his own? Who among them could have guessed what Greek could do, though they had spoken it all their lives, till they heard it from his lips?" So with our English tongue; it has abundant capabilities for those who know how to use it aright. What subject, indeed, is there in the whole boundless range of imagination, which some English author has not treated in his mother tongue with a nicety of definition, an accuracy of portraiture, a gorgeousness of coloring, a delicacy of discrimination, and a strength and force of expression,

which fall scarcely short of perfection itself? Is there not something almost like sorcery in the potent spell which some of these mighty magicians of language are able to exercise over the soul? Yet the right arrangement of the right words is the whole secret of the witchery,—a charm within the reach of any one of equal genius. Possess yourself of the necessary ideas, and feel them deeply, and you will not often complain of the barrenness of language. You will find it abounding in riches,—exuberant beyond the demand of your intensest thought. "The statue is not more surely included in the block of marble, than is all conceivable splendor of utterance in 'Webster's Unabridged.'" As Goethe says:

"Be thine to seek the honest gain,
No shallow-sounding fool;
Sound sense finds utterance for itself,
Without the critic's rule;
If to your heart your tongue be true,
Why hunt for words with much ado?"

But we hear some one say,—is this the only secret of apt words? Is nothing more necessary to be done by one who would obtain a command of language? Does not Dr. Blair tell us to study the "Spectator," if we would learn to write well; and does not Dr. Johnson, too, declare that "whoever wishes to obtain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison?" Yes, and it is a pity that Johnson did not act upon his own advice. That it is well for a writer to familiarize himself with the best models of style (models sufficiently numerous to prevent that mannerism which is apt to result from unconscious imitation, when he is familiar with but one) nobody can doubt. A man's vocabulary

depends largely on the company he keeps; and without a proper vocabulary no man can be a good writer. Words are the material that the author works in, and he must use as much care in their selection as the sculptor in choosing his marble, or the painter in choosing his colors. By listening to those who speak well, by profound study of the masterpieces of literature, by exercises in translation, and, above all, by frequent and careful practice in speaking and writing, he may not only enrich his vocabulary, learn the secret of the great writer's charm, and elevate and refine his taste as he can in no other way, but acquire such a mastery of language that it shall become, at last, a willing and ready instrument, obedient to the lightest challenge of his thought. Words, apt and telling, will then flow spontaneously, though the result of the subtlest art, like the waters of our city fountains, which, with much toil and at great expense, are carried into the public squares, yet appear to gush forth naturally. But to suppose that a good style can be acquired by imitating any one writer, or any set of writers, is one of the greatest follies that can be imagined. Such a supposition is based on the notion that fine writing is an addition from without to the matter treated of,—a kind of ornament superinduced, or luxury indulged in, by one who has sufficient genius; whereas the brilliant or powerful writer is not one who has merely a copious vocabulary, and can turn on at will any number of splendid phrases and swelling sentences, but he is one who has something to say, and knows how to say it. Whether he dashes off his compositions at a heat, or elaborates them with fastidious nicety and care, he has but one aim, which he keeps steadily before him, and that is to give forth what

is in him. From this very earnestness it follows that, whatever be the brilliancy of his diction, or the harmony of his style,— whether it blaze with the splendors of a gorgeous rhetoric, or take the ear prisoner with its musical surprises,— he never makes these an end, but has always the charm of an incommunicable simplicity.

Such a person "writes passionately because he feels keenly; forcibly, because he conceives vividly; he sees too clearly to be vague; he is too serious to be otiose: he can analyze his subject, and therefore he is rich; he embraces it as a whole and in parts, and therefore he is consistent; he has a firm hold of it, and therefore he is luminous. When his imagination wells up, it overflows in ornament; when his heart is touched, it thrills along his verse. He always has the right word for the right idea, and never a word too much. If he is brief, it is because few words suffice; when he is lavish of them, still each word has its mark, and aids, not embarrasses, the vigorous march of his elocution. He expresses what all feel, but what all cannot say, and his sayings pass into proverbs among the people, and his phrases become household words and idioms of their daily speech, which is tessellated with the rich fragments of his language, as we see in foreign lands the marbles of Roman grandeur worked into the walls and pavements of modern palaces." *

It follows from all this that there is no model style, and that the kind of style demanded in any composition depends upon the man and his theme. The first law of good writing is that it should be an expression of a man's self,— a reflected image of his own character. If we know what the man is, we know what his style should be. If it

* "The Idea of a University," by J. H. Newman.

mirrors his individuality, it is, relatively, good; if it is not a self-portraiture, it is bad, however polished its periods, or rhythmical its cadences. The graces and witcheries of expression which charm us in an original writer, offend us in a copyist. Style is sometimes, though not very happily, termed the dress of thought. It is really, as Wordsworth long ago declared, the *incarnation* of thought. In Greek, the same word, Logos, stands for reason and speech,—and why? Because they cannot be divided; because thought and expression are one. They each co-exist, not one *with* the other, but *in* and *through* the other. Not till we can separate the soul and the body, life and motion, the convex and concave of a curve, shall we be able to divorce thought from the language which only can embody it. But allowing, for the moment, that style is the verbal clothing of ideas, who but the most poverty-stricken person would think of wearing the clothes of another? It is true that there are certain general qualities, such as clearness, force, flexibility, simplicity, variety, which all good styles will alike possess, just as all good clothing will have certain qualities in common. But for all men to clothe their thoughts in the same manner would be as foolish as for a giant to array himself in the garments of a dwarf, a stout man in those of a thin, or a brunette in those of a blonde. Robert Hall, when preaching in early life at Cambridge, England, for a short time aped Dr. Johnson; but he soon saw the folly of it. "I might as well have attempted," said he, "to dance a hornpipe in the cumbrous costume of Gog and Magog. My puny thoughts could not sustain the load of words in which I tried to clothe them."

It is with varieties of style as with the varieties of the human face, or of the leaves of the forest; while they are

obvious in their general resemblance, yet there are never two indistinguishably alike. Sometimes the differences are very slight,—so minute and subtle, as almost to defy characterization; yet, like the differences in musical styles which closely resemble each other, they are *felt* by the discerning reader, and so strongly that he will scarcely mistake the authorship, even on a single reading. Men of similar natures will have similar styles; but think of Waller aping the gait of Wordsworth, or Leigh Hunt that of Milton! Can any one conceive of Hooker's style as slipshod,—of Dryden's as feeble and obscure,—of Gibbon's as mean and vulgar,—of Burke's as timid and creeping,—of Carlyle's as dainty and mincing,—of Emerson's as diffuse and pointless,—or of Napier's as lacking picturesqueness, *verve*, and fire?

There are some writers of a quiet, even temperament, whose sentences flow gently along like a stream through a level country, that hardly disturbs the stillness of the air by a sound; there are others vehement, rapid, redundant, that roll on like a mountain torrent forcing its way over all obstacles, and filling the valleys and woods with the echoes of its roar. One author, deep in one place, and shallow in another, reminds you of the Ohio, here unfordable, and there full of sand bars,—now hurrying on with rapid current, and now expanding into lovely lakes, fringed with forests and overhung with hills; another, always brimming with thought, reminds you of the Mississippi, which rolls onward the same vast volume, with no apparent diminution, from Cairo to New Orleans. "Sydney Smith, concise, brisk, and brilliant, has a manner of composition which exactly corresponds to those qualities; but how would Lord Bacon look in Smith's sentences? How grandly

the soul of Milton rolls and winds through the arches and labyrinths of his involved and magnificent diction, waking musical echoes at every new turn and variation of its progress; but how could the thought of such a light trifler as Cibber travel through so glorious a maze, without being lost or crushed in the journey? The plain, manly language of John Locke could hardly be translated into the terminology of Kant,— would look out of place in the rapid and sparkling movement of Cousin's periods,— and would appear mean in the cadences of Dugald Stewart."*

Not only has every original writer his own style, which mirrors his individuality, but the writers of every age differ from those of every other age. Joubert has well said that if the French authors of to-day were to write as men wrote in the time of Louis XIV, their style would lack truthfulness, for the French of to-day have not the same dispositions, the same opinions, the same manners. A woman who should write like Madame Sévigné would be ridiculous, because she is not Madame Sévigné. The more one's writing smacks of his own character and of the manners of his time, the more widely must his style diverge from that of the writers who were models only because they excelled in manifesting in their works either the manners of *their* own age or *their* own character. Who would tolerate to-day a writer who should reproduce, however successfully, the stately periods of Johnson, the mellifluous lines of Pope, or the faultless but nerveless periods of Addison? The style that is to please to-day must be dense with meaning and full of color; it must be suggestive, sharp, and incisive. So far is imitation of the old masterpieces from being commendable, that, as Joubert

*"Essays and Reviews," by Edwin P Whipple.

says, good taste itself permits one to avoid imitating the best styles, for taste, even good taste, changes with manners,—"*Le bon goût lui-même, en ce cas, permet qu'on s'écarte du meilleur goût, car le goût change avec les mœurs, même le bon goût.*"

Let no man, then, aim at the cultivation of style for style's sake, independently of ideas, for all such aims will result in failure. To suppose that noble or impressive language is a communicable trick of rhetoric and accent, is one of the most mischievous of fallacies. Every writer has his own ideas and feelings,—his own conceptions, judgments, discriminations, and comparisons,—which are personal, proper to himself, in the same sense that his looks, his voice, his air, his gait, and his action are personal. If he has a vulgar mind, he will write vulgarly; if he has a noble nature, he will write nobly; in every case, the beauty or ugliness of his moral countenance, the force and keenness or the feebleness of his logic, will be imaged in his language. It follows, therefore, as Ruskin says, that all the virtues of language are, in their roots, moral: it becomes accurate, if the writer desires to be true; clear, if he write with sympathy and a desire to be intelligible; powerful, if he has earnestness; pleasant, if he has a sense of rhythm and order.

This sensibility of language to the impulses and qualities of him who uses it; its flexibility in accommodating itself to all the thoughts, feelings, imaginations, and aspirations which pass within him, so as to become the faithful expression of his personality, indicating the very pulsating and throbbing of his intellect, and attending on his own inward world of thought as its very shadow; and, strangest, perhaps, the magical power it has, where

thought transcends the sensuous capacities of language, to suggest the idea or mood it cannot directly convey, and to give forth an aroma which no analysis of word or expression reveals,—is one of the marvels of human speech. The writer, therefore, who is so magnetized by another's genius that he cannot say anything in his own way, but is perpetually imitating the other's structure of sentence and turns of expression, confesses his barrenness. The only way to make another's style one's own is to possess one's self of his mind and soul. If we would reproduce his peculiarities of diction, we must first acquire the qualities that produced them. "Language," says Goldwin Smith, "is not a musical instrument into which, if a fool breathe, it will make melody. Its tones are evoked only by the spirit of high or tender thought; and though truth is not always eloquent, real eloquence is always the glow of truth." As Sainte-Beuve says of the plainness and brevity of Napoleon's style,—"*Prétendre imiter le precédé de diction du héros qui sut abréger Cæsar lui-même . . . il convient* d'avoir fait d'aussi grandes choses *pour avoir le droit d'être aussi nu.*"

It is not imitation, but general culture,—as another has said, the constant submission of a teachable, apprehensive mind to the influence of minds of the highest order, in daily life and books,—that brings out upon style its daintiest bloom and its richest fruitage. "So in the making of a fine singer, after the voice has been developed, and the rudiments of vocalization have been learned, farther instruction is almost of no avail. But the frequent hearing of the best music given by the best singers and instrumentalists,—the living in an atmosphere of art and literature,—will develop and perfect a

vocal style in one who has the gift of song; and, for any other, all the instruction of all the musical professors that ever came out of Italy will do no more than teach an avoidance of positive errors in musical grammar."*

The Cabalists believed that whoever found the mystic word for anything attained to as absolute mastery over that thing as did the robbers over the door of their cave in the Arabian tale. The converse is true of expression; for he who is thoroughly possessed of his thought becomes master of the *word* fitted to express it, while he who has but a half-possession of it vainly seeks to torture out of language the secret of that inspiration which should be in himself. The secret of force in writing or speaking lies not in Blair's "Rhetoric," or Roget's "Thesaurus,"—not in having a copious vocabulary, or a dozen words for every idea,—but in having something that you earnestly wish to say, and making the parts of speech vividly conscious of it. Phidias, the great Athenian sculptor, said of one of his pupils that he had an inspired thumb, because the modelling clay yielded to its careless touch a grace of sweep which it refused to the utmost pains of others. So he who has thoroughly possessed himself of his thought will not have to hunt through his dictionary for apt and expressive words,—a method which is but an outside remedy for an inward defect,—but will find language eagerly obedient to him, as if every word should say,

"*Bid* me discourse; I will enchant thine ear,"

and fit expressions, as Milton says, "like so many nimble and airy servitors, will trip about him at command, and, in well-ordered files, fall aptly into their own places."

* "Words and Their Uses," by Richard Grant White.

It was the boast of Dante that no word had ever forced him to say what *he* would not, though he had forced many a word to say what *it* would not; and so will every writer, who as vividly conceives and as deeply feels his theme, be able to conjure out of words their uttermost secret of power or pathos.

The question has been sometimes discussed whether the best style is a colorless medium, which, like good glass, only lets the thought be distinctly seen, or whether it imparts a pleasure apart from the ideas it conveys. There are those who hold that when language is simply transparent,—when it comes to us so refined of all its dross, so spiritualized in its substance that we lose sight of it as a vehicle, and the thought stands out with clearness in all its proportions,—we are at the very summit of the literary art. This is the character of Southey's best prose, and of Paley's writing, whose statement of a false theory is so lucid that it becomes a refutation. There are writers, however, who charm us by their language, apart from the ideas it conveys. There is a kind of mysterious perfume about it, a delicious aroma, which we keenly enjoy, but for which we cannot account. Poetry often possesses a beauty wholly unconnected with its meaning. Who has not admired, independently of the sense, its "jewels, five words long, that, on the stretched forefinger of all time, sparkle forever"? There are passages in which the mere cadence of the words is by itself delicious to a delicate ear, though we cannot tell how and why. We are conscious of a strange, dreamy sense of enjoyment, such as one feels when lying upon the grass in a June evening, while a brook tinkles over stones among the sedges and trees. Sir Philip Sidney could not hear the old ballad of Chevy

Chase without his blood being stirred as by the sound of a trumpet; Boyle felt a tremor at the utterance of two verses of Lucan; and Spence declares that he never repeated particular lines of delicate modulation without a shiver in his blood, not to be expressed. Who is not sensible of certain magical effects, altogether distinct from the thoughts, in some of Coleridge's weird verse, in Keats's "Nightingale," and in the grand harmonies of Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, Ruskin, and De Quincey?

Perspicuity, or transparency of style, is, undoubtedly, the first law of all composition; but it may be doubted whether *viridness*, which was the ruling conception of the Greeks with regard to this property of style, is not quite as essential. Style, it has been well said, "is not only a medium; it is also a form. It is not enough that the thoughts be seen through a clear medium; they must be seen in a distinct shape. It is not enough that truth be visible in a clear, pure air; the atmosphere must not only be crystalline and sparkling, but the things in it must be bounded and defined by sharply cut lines." *

A style may be as transparent as rock-water, and yet the thoughts be destitute of boldness and originality. The highest degree of transparency, however, can be attained only by the writer who has thoroughly mastered his theme, and whose whole nature is stirred by it. As that exquisite material through which we gaze from our windows on the beauties of nature, obtains its crystalline beauty after undergoing the furnace,—as it was melted by fire before the rough particles of sand disappeared,—so it is with language. It is only a burning invention that can make it transparent. A powerful imagination must fuse the

* "Homiletics and Pastoral Theology," by W. G. Shedd, D.D.

harsh elements of composition until all foreign substances have disappeared, and every coarse, shapeless word has been absorbed by the heat, and then the language will brighten into that clear and unclouded style through which the most delicate conceptions of the mind and the faintest emotions of the heart are visible.

How many human thoughts have baffled for generations every attempt to give them expression! How many opinions and conclusions are there, which form the basis of our daily reflections, the matter for the ordinary operations of our minds, which were toiled after perhaps for ages, before they were seized and rendered comprehensible! How many ideas are there which we ourselves have grasped at, as if we saw them floating in an atmosphere just above us, and found the arm of our intellect just too short to reach them; and then comes a happier genius, who, in a lucky moment, and from some vantage ground, arrests the meteor in its flight, and, grasping the floating phantom, drags it from the skies to earth; condenses that which was but an impalpable coruscation of spirit; fetters that which was but the lightning-glance of thought; and, having so mastered it, bestows it as a perpetual possession and heritage on mankind!

The arrangement of words by great writers on the printed page has sometimes been compared to the arrangement of soldiers on the field; and if it is interesting to see how a great general marshals his regiments, it is certainly not less so to see how the Alexanders and Napoleons of letters marshal their verbal battalions on the battle-fields of thought. Foremost among those who wield despotic sway over the domain of letters, is my Lord Bacon, whose words are like a Spartan phalanx, closely compacted,—

almost crowding each other, so close are their files,—and all moving in irresistible array, without confusion or chasm, now holding some Thermopylæ of new truth against some scholastic Xerxes, now storming some ancient Malakoff of error, but always with "victory sitting eagle-winged on their crests." A strain of music bursts on your ear, sweet as is Apollo's lute, and lo! Milton's dazzling files, clad in celestial panoply, lifting high their gorgeous ensign, which "shines like a meteor, streaming to the wind," "breathing united force and fixed thought," come moving on "in perfect phalanx, to the Dorian mood of flutes and soft recorders." Next comes Chillingworth, with his glittering rapier, all rhetorical rule and flourish, according to the schools,—*passado*, *montanso*, *staccato*,—one, two, three,—the third in your bosom. Then stalks along Chatham, with his two-handed sword, striking with the edge, while he pierces with the point, and stuns with the hilt, and wielding the ponderous weapon as easily as you would a flail. Next strides Johnson with elephantine tread, with the club of logic in one hand and a revolver in the other, hitting right and left with antithetical blows, and, "when his pistol misses fire, knocking you down with the butt end of it." Burke, with lighted linstock in hand, stands by a Lancaster gun; he touches it, and forth there burst, with loud and ringing roar, missiles of every conceivable description,—chain shot, stone, iron darts, spikes, shells, grenadoes, torpedoes, and balls, that cut down everything before them. Close after him steals Jeffrey, armed cap-a-pie,—carrying a tomahawk in one hand and a scalping-knife in the other,—steeped to the eye in fight, cunning of fence, master of his weapon and merciless in its use, and "playing it

like a tongue of flame" before his trembling victims. There is Brougham, slaying half-a-dozen enemies at once with a tremendous Scotch claymore; Macaulay, running under his opponent's guard, and stabbing him to the heart with the heavy dagger of a short, epigrammatic sentence; Hugh Elliot, cracking his enemies' skulls with a sledge-hammer, or pounding them to jelly with his huge fists; Sydney Smith, firing his arrows, feathered with fancy and pointed with the steel of the keenest wit; Disraeli, armed with an oriental scimitar, which dazzles while it kills; Emerson, transfixing his adversaries with a blade of transcendental temper, snatched from the scabbard of Plato; and Carlyle, relentless iconoclast of shams, who "gangs his ain gait," armed with an antique stone axe, with which he smashes solemn humbugs as you would drugs with a pestle and mortar.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET OF APT WORDS — (*continued*).

"To acquire a few tongues," says a French writer, "is the task of a few years; but to be eloquent in one is the labor of a life."—COLTON.

When words are restrained by common usage to a particular sense, to run up to etymology, and construe them by a dictionary, is wretchedly ridiculous.—JEREMY COLLIER.

> Where do the words of Greece and Rome excel,
> That England may not please the ear as well?
> What mighty magic's in the place or air,
> That all perfection needs must centre there?—CHURCHILL.

IT is an interesting question connected with the subject of style, whether a knowledge of other languages is necessary to give an English writer a full command of his own. Among the arguments urged in behalf of the study of Greek and Latin in our colleges, one of the commonest is the supposed absolute necessity of a knowledge of those tongues to one who would speak and write his own language effectively. The English language, we are reminded, is a composite one, of whose words thirty per cent are of Roman origin, and nearly five per cent of Greek; and is it not an immense help, we are asked, to a full and accurate knowledge of the meanings of the words we use, to know their entire history, including their origin? Is not the many-sided Goethe an authority on this subject, and does he not tell us that "*wer fremde sprache nicht kennt weiss nichts von seinen eigenen*,"—"He who is acquainted with no foreign tongues, knows nothing of his own"? Have we not the authority of one

of the earliest of English schoolmasters, Roger Ascham, for the opinion that, "even as a hawke fleeth not hie with one wing, even so a man reacheth not to excellency with one tongue"?

In answering the general question in the negative, we do not mean to question the value or profound interest of philological studies, or to express any doubt concerning their utility as a means of mental discipline. The value of classical literature as an instrument of education has been decided by an overwhelming majority of persons of culture. We cannot, without prejudice to humanity, separate the present from the past. The nineteenth century strikes its roots into the centuries gone by, and draws nutriment from them. Our whole literature is closely connected with that of the ancients, draws its inspiration from it, and can be understood only by constant reference to it. As a means of that encyclopedic culture, of that thorough intellectual equipment, which is one of the most imperious demands of modern society, an acquaintance with foreign, and especially with classic, literature, is absolutely indispensable; for the records of knowledge and of thought are many-tongued, and even if a great writer could have wreaked his thoughts upon expression in another language, it is certain that another mind can only in a few cases adequately translate them. It is only by the study of different languages and different literatures, ancient as well as modern, that we can escape that narrowness of thought, that Chinese cast of mind, which characterizes those persons who know no language but their own, and learn to distinguish what is essentially, universally, and eternally good and true from what is the result of accident, local opinion, or the fleeting circumstances of the

time. It is useless to say that we know human nature thoroughly, if we know nothing of antiquity; and we can know antiquity only by study of the originals. Mitford, Grote, and Mommsen differ, and the reader who consults them with no knowledge of Greek or Latin is at the mercy of the last author he has perused. It has been frequently remarked that every school of thinkers has its mannerism and its mania, for which there is no cure but intercourse with those who are free from them. To study any class of writers exclusively is to bow slavishly to their authority, to accept their opinions, to make their tastes our tastes, and their prejudices our prejudices. Only by qualifying their ideas and sentiments with the thoughts and sentiments of writers in other ages, shall we be able to resist the intense pressure which is thus exercised upon our convictions and feelings, and avoid that mental slavery which is baser than the slavery of the body.

The question, however, is not about the general educational value of classical studies, but whether they are indispensable to him who would write or speak English with the highest force, elegance, and accuracy. I think they are not. In the first place, I deny that a knowledge of the etymologies of words,—of their meanings a hundred or five hundred years ago,—is essential to their proper use now. How am I aided in the use of the word "villain" by knowing that it once meant peasant,—in the use of "wince" by knowing that it meant kick,—in the use of "brat," "beldam," and "pedant," by knowing that they meant, respectively, child, fine lady, and tutor,—in the use of "meddle," by knowing that formerly it had no offensive meaning, and that one could meddle even with his own affairs? Am I more or less likely to use "ringleader"

correctly to-day, from learning that Christ is correctly spoken of by an old divine as "the ringleader of our salvation"? Shall I be helped in the employment of the word "musket" by knowing that it was once the name of a small hawk, or fly, or in the use of the word "tragedy" by knowing that it is connected in some way with the Greek word for a goat? Facts like these are of deep interest to all, and of high value to the scholar; but how is the knowledge of them necessary that one may speak or write well?

The question with the man who addresses his fellow-man by tongue or pen to-day, is not what ought to be, or formerly was, the meaning of a word, but, what is it *now?* Indeed, it may be doubted whether a reference to the roots and derivations,—the old original meanings of words,—which have grown obsolete by the fluctuations of manners, customs, and a thousand other causes, does not, as Archbishop Whately insists, tend to confusion, and prove rather a hindrance than a help to the correct use of our tongue. Words not only, for the most part, ride very slackly at anchor on their etymologies, borne, as they are, hither and thither by the shifting tides and currents of usage, but they often break away from their moorings altogether. The knowledge of a man's antecedents may help us sometimes to estimate his present self: but the knowledge of what a word meant three or twenty centuries ago may only mislead us as to its meaning now. Spenser uses the word "edify" in the sense of "to build"; but would any one speak of a house being edified to-day? "Symbol" and "conjecture" are words that etymologically have precisely the same signification; and the same is true of "hypostasis," "substance," and

"understanding," derived respectively from the Greek, Latin, and Saxon; yet have either the two former, or the three latter words, as they are now used, the least similarity of meaning? Is it desirable to call a suffering man a "passionate" man,—to say with Bishop Lowth that "the Emperor Julian very 'judiciously' planned the overthrow of Christianity,"—to speak with Paley of the "judiciousness" of God,—and with Guizot of the "duplicity" of certain plays of Shakespeare (meaning their dual structure), —merely because we find these significations lying at the remote and dead roots of the words which we now employ in wholly different significations? The effect of a constant reference to etymology, in the use of words, is seen in the writings of Milton, whose use of "elate" for "lifted on high," "implicit" for "entangled," "succinct" for "girded," "spirited" for "inspired," and hundreds of other such perversions of language, may please the scholar who loves to crack philological nuts, but is fitted only to perplex, confound, and mislead the ordinary reader. It is seen still more plainly in the writings of Donne, Jeremy Taylor, and Sir Thomas Browne, who not only imported Latin words by wholesale into the language, only giving them an anglicized form and termination, but sometimes employed in a new sense words already adopted into English, and used in their original sense. Thus Taylor uses "immured" for "encompassed," "irritation" for "making void"; and in referring to "the bruising of the serpent's head," he ludicrously speaks of the "'contrition' of the serpent." Again, he uses the word "excellent" for "surpassing," and even perverts the meaning of the word so far as to speak of "an 'excellent' pain!"

Will it be said that words become more vivid and picturesque,— that we get a firmer and more vigorous grasp of their meaning,—when, as Coleridge advises, we present to our minds the visual images that form their primary meanings? The reply is, that long use deadens us to the susceptibility of such images, and in not one case in a thousand, probably, are they noticed. How many college graduates think of a "miser" as being etymologically a "miserable" man, of a "savage" as one living in "a wood," or of a "desultory" reader as one who leaps from one study to another, as a circus rider leaps from horse to horse? A distinguished poet once confessed that the Latin *imago* first suggested itself to him as the root of the English word "imagination" when, after having been ten years a versifier, he was asked by a friend to define this most important term in the critical vocabulary of his art. "We have had to notice over and over again," says Mr. Whitney in his late work on "The Life and Growth of Language," "the readiness on the part of language-users to forget origins, to cast aside as cumbrous rubbish the etymological suggestiveness of a term, and concentrate force upon the new and more adventitious tie. This is one of the most fundamental and valuable tendencies in name-making; it constitutes an essential part of the practical availability of language."

If a knowledge of Greek and Latin is necessary to him who would command all the resources of our tongue, how comes it that the most consummate mastery of the English language is exhibited by Shakespeare? Will it be said that his writings prove him to have been a classical scholar; that they abound in facts and allusions which imply an intimate acquaintance with the masterpieces of

Greek and Roman literature? We answer that this is a palpable begging of the question. By the same reasoning we can prove that scores of English authors, who, we know positively, never read a page of Latin or Greek, were, nevertheless, classical scholars. By similar logic we can prove that Shakespeare followed every calling in life. Lawyers vouch for his acquaintance with law; physicians for his skill in medicine; mad-doctors for his knowledge of the phenomena of mental disease; naturalists assert positively, from the internal evidence of his works, that he was a botanist and an entomologist; bishops, that he was a theologian; and claims have been put forth for his dexterity in cutting up sheep and bullocks. Ben Jonson tells us that he had "small Latin and less Greek"; another contemporary, that he had "little Latin and no Greek." "Small Latin," indeed, it must have been which a youth could have acquired in his position, who married and entered upon the duties of active life at eighteen. The fact that translations were abundant in the poet's time, and that all the literature of that day was steeped in classicism, will fully account for Shakespeare's knowledge of Greek and Roman history, as well as for the classical turns of expression which we find in his plays.

But it may be said that Shakespeare, the oceanic, the many-souled, was phenomenal, and that no rule can be based on the miracles of a cometary genius who has had no peer in the ages. What shall we say, then, to Izaak Walton? Can purer, more idiomatic, or more attractive English be found within the covers of any book than that of "The Complete Angler"? Among all the controversialists of England, is there one whose words hit harder,—are more like cannon-balls,—than those of Cobbett?

By universal concession he was master of the whole vocabulary of invective, and in narration his pen is pregnant with the freshness of green fields and woods; yet neither he, nor "honest Izaak," ever dug up a Greek root, or unearthed a Latin derivation. Let any one compare a page of Cobbett with a page of Bentley, the great classical critic, and he will find that the former writer excels the latter alike in clearness and precision of terms, in grammatical accuracy, and in the construction of his periods. Again, what shall we say of Keats, who could not read a line of Greek, yet who was the most thoroughly classical of all English authors,— whose soul was so saturated with the Greek spirit, that Byron said "he was a Greek himself"? Or what will the classicists do with Lord Erskine, confessedly the greatest forensic orator since Demosthenes? He learned but the elements of Latin, and in Greek went scarcely beyond the alphabet; but he devoted himself in youth with intense ardor to the study of Milton and Shakespeare, committing whole pages of the former to memory, and so familiarizing himself with the latter that he could almost, like Porson, have held conversations on all subjects for days together in the phrases of the great English dramatist. It was here that he acquired that fine choice of words, that richness of thought and gorgeousness of expression, that beautiful *rhythmus* of his sentences, which charmed all who heard him.

If one must learn English through the Greek and Latin, how shall we account for the admirable,— we had almost said, inimitable,— style of Franklin? Before he knew anything of foreign languages he had formed his style, and gained a wide command of words by the study of the best English models. Is the essayist, Edwin P.

Whipple, a master of the English language? He was not, we believe, classically educated, yet few American authors have a greater command of all the resources of expression. His style varies in excellence,— sometimes, perhaps, lacks simplicity; but, as a rule, it is singularly copious, nervous, and suggestive, and clear as a pebbled rill. What is the secret of this command of our tongue? It is his familiarity with our English literature. His sleepless intellect has fed and fattened on the whole race of English authors, from Chaucer to Currer Bell. The profound, sagacious wisdom of Bacon, and the nimble, brilliant wit of Sydney Smith; the sublime mysticism of Sir Thomas Browne, and the rich, mellow, tranquil beauty of Taylor; Jonson's learned sock and Heywood's ease; the gorgeous, organ-toned eloquence of Milton, and the close, bayonet-like logic of Chillingworth; the sweet-blooded wit of Fuller, and Butler's rattling fire of fun; Spenser's voluptuous beauty, and the lofty rhetoric, scorching wit, and crushing argument of South; Pope's neatness, brilliancy, and epigrammatic point, and Dryden's energy and "full resounding line"; Byron's sublime unrest and bursts of misanthropy, and Wordsworth's deep sentiment and sweet humanities; Shelley's wild imaginative melody, and Scott's picturesque imagery and antiquarian lore; the polished witticisms of Sheridan, and the gorgeous periods of Burke, — with all these writers, and every other of greater or lesser note, even those in the hidden nooks and crannies of our literature, he has held converse, and drawn from them expressions for every exigency of his thought.

To all these examples we may add one, if possible, still more convincing,— that of the late Hugh Miller, who, as Professor Marsh justly remarks, had few contemporaneous

superiors as a clear, forcible, accurate, and eloquent writer, and who *uses the most cumbrous Greek compounds* as freely as monosyllabic English particles. His style is literally the despair of all other English scientific writers; yet it is positively certain that he was wholly ignorant of all languages but that in which he wrote, and its Northern provincial dialects.

As to the oft-quoted saying of Goethe, to which the objector is so fond of referring, we may say with Professor Marsh, that, "if by knowledge of a language is meant the power of expressing or conceiving the laws of a language in formal rules, the opinion may be well founded; but, if it refers to the capacity of understanding, and skill in properly using our own tongue, all observation shows it to be very wide of the truth." Goethe himself, the same authority declares, was an indifferent linguist; he apparently knew little of the remoter etymological sources of his own tongue, or the special philologies of the cognate languages; and "it is difficult to trace any of the excellencies of his marvellously felicitous style to the direct imitation, or even the unconscious influence of foreign models."* But he was a profound student of the great German writers of the sixteenth century; and hence his works are a test example in refutation of the theory that ascribes so exaggerated a value to classical studies.

It is a remarkable fact, which throws a flood of light upon this subject, that the greatest masters of style in all the ages were the Greeks, who yet knew no word of any language but their own. In the most flourishing period of their literature, they had no grammatical system, nor did they ever make any but the most trivial researches

* "Lectures on the English Language."

in etymology. "The wise and learned nations among the ancients," says Locke, "made it a part of education to cultivate their own, not foreign languages. The Greeks counted all other nations barbarous, and had a contempt for their languages. And though the Greek learning grew in credit among the Romans, . . . yet it was the Roman tongue that was made the study of their youth; their own language they were to make use of, and therefore it was their own language they were instructed and exercised in." Demosthenes, the greatest master of the Greek language, and one of the mightiest masters of expression the world has seen, knew no other tongue than his own. He modelled his style after that of Thucydides, whose wonderful compactness, terseness, and strength of diction were derived from no study of old Pelasgic, Phœnician, Persian, or other primitive etymologies of the Attic speech,—of which he knew nothing,—but were the product of his own marvellous genius wreaking itself upon expression.

No riches are without inconvenience. The men of many tongues almost inevitably lose their peculiar raciness of home-bred utterance, and their style, like their words, has a certain polyglot character. It has been observed by an acute Oxford professor that the Romans, in exact proportion to their study of Greek, paralyzed some of the finest powers of their own language. Schiller tells us that he was in the habit of reading as little as possible in foreign languages, because it was his business to write *German*, and he thought that, by reading other languages, he should lose his nicer perceptions of what belonged to his own. Dryden attributed most of Cowley's defects to his continental associations, and said that his losses at home overbalanced his gains from abroad. Thomas Moore,

who was a fine classical scholar, tells us that the perfect purity with which the Greeks wrote their own language was justly attributed to their entire abstinence from every other. It is a saying as old as Cicero that women, being accustomed solely to their native tongue, usually speak and write it with a grace and purity surpassing those of men. "A man who thinks the knowledge of Latin essential to the purity of English diction," says Macaulay, "either has never conversed with an accomplished woman, or does not deserve to have conversed with her. We are sure that all persons who are in the habit of hearing public speaking must have observed that the orators who are fondest of quoting Latin are by no means the most scrupulous about marring their native tongue. We could mention several members of Parliament, who never fail to usher in their scraps of Horace and Juvenal with half-a-dozen false concords."

Mr. Buckle, in his "History of Civilization in England," does not hesitate to express the opinion that "our great English scholars have corrupted the English language by jargon so uncouth that a plain man can hardly discern the real lack of ideas which their barbarous and mottled dialect strives to hide." He then adds that the principal reason why well educated women write and converse in a purer style than well educated men, is "because they have not formed their taste according to those ancient classical standards, which, admirable as they are in themselves, should never be introduced into a state of society unfitted for them." To nearly the same effect is the declaration of that most acute judge of style, Thomas De Quincey, who says that if you would read our noble language in its native beauty, picturesque form, idiomatic

propriety, racy in its phraseology, delicate yet sinewy in its composition, you must steal the mail-bags, and break open the women's letters. On the other hand, who has forgotten what havoc Bentley made when he laid his classic hand on "Paradise Lost"? What prose style, always excepting that of the "Areopagitica," is worse for imitation than that of Milton, with its long, involved, half-rhythmical periods, "dragging, like a wounded snake, their slow length along"? Yet Bentley and Milton, whose minds were imbued, saturated with Greek literature through and through, were probably the profoundest classical scholars that England can boast. Let the student, then, who has a patriotic love for his native tongue, study it in its most idiomatic writers, and beware lest while he is wandering in fancy along the banks of the Meander, the Ilyssus, or the Tiber, or drinking at the fountains of Helicon, he heedlessly and profanely trample under foot the beautiful, fragrant, and varied productions of his own land.

CHAPTER X.

ONOMATOPES.

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.—POPE.

Our blunted senses can no more realize the original delicacy of the appellative faculty, than they can attain to the keen perfection in which they still exist in the savage.—LEPSIUS.

WHATEVER opinion we have of the onomatopœia theory of the origin of language, so ably advocated by Farrar, Wedgwood, and Whitney, and so keenly ridiculed by Max Müller and others, it is impossible to deny that there is a natural relationship between thought and articulate sound,—in other words that certain sounds are the natural expression of certain sensations, and of mental states that are analogous to those sensations. All languages contain words which, in their very structure as composite sounds, more or less nearly resemble in quality, as soft or harsh, the sounds they designate. Such, in our language, are words representing animal sounds, as quack, cackle, roar, whinny, bellow, caw, croak, hiss, screech, etc.; words representing inarticulate human sounds, as laugh, cough, sob, shriek, whoop, etc.; sounds representing the collision of hard bodies, as clap, rap, tap, slap, etc.; sounds representing the collision of softer bodies, as dab, dub, thud, dub-a-dub; sounds representing motion through the air, as whizz, buzz, sough, etc.; sounds representing resonance, as clang, knell, ring, twang, etc.; and sounds rep-

resenting the motion of liquids, as clash, splash, dash, etc.* Even the various degrees of intensity in sound are expressed by modifications of the vowels,—high notes being represented by *i*, low, broad sounds by *a*, and diminution by the change of *a* or *o* to *i;* while continuance is expressed by a reduplication of syllables, as in murmur, etc., and by the addition of *r* and *l*, as in grab, grapple, wrest, wrestle, crack, crackle, dab, dabble. Animals are often named, upon the same principle, from their cries, birds especially, as we see in whip-poor-will, cuckoo, crow, quail, curlew, chough, owl, peewit, turtle, and many others. Again, we find that, independently of all confusion between a word and its associations, words having a harsh signification generally have a rough, harsh form, while words that denote something soft and pleasing, or sweet and tender, seem to breathe the very sensation they describe. The various passions of men naturally find expression in different sounds. Anger, vehemence, gentleness, etc., have each a language, a style of utterance, peculiar to themselves. Love and sorrow prompt smooth, melodious expressions, while violent emotions express themselves in words that are hurried, abrupt and harsh.

Were further proof wanting of this connection between external sounds and the processes of the mind, it is supplied in the strongest form by the fact that the different languages of the earth are stamped with marks of predominant local influences,— of the climate, scenery, and other physical conditions amid which they have been evolved. Rousseau, a century ago, called attention to the fact that the languages of the rich and prodigal South, being the

* This classification is from Farrar, who has abridged it from Wedgwood, in Phil. Trans. II., 118.

daughters of passion, are poetic and musical, while those of the North, the daughters of necessity, bear a trace of their hard origin, and express by rude sounds rude sensations. Who does not discern in the "soft and vowelled undersong" of the Italian the effect of a climate altogether different from that which has produced the stridulous, hirrient roughness of the German, the Dutch, and the Russian tongues? What but different geographical positions has made the language of the South-Sea Islanders so different from the dissonant clicks of the Hottentot, or the guttural polysyllables of the Cherokee? What other cause has made the language of the Tlascalans, the hardy and independent mountaineers dwelling in the high volcanic regions between Mexico and Vera Cruz, so much rougher than the polished Tezucan, or the popular dialect of the Aztecs, who are of the same family as the mountaineers? It is because the vocal organs, which are formed with exceeding delicacy, are affected by the most trifling physical influences, that English is spoken in Devonshire, England, with a splutter, and in Suffolk with an attenuated whine; that the language spoken in the northern counties is harsher than that spoken in the southern; and that in the mountainous regions we find a harsher dialect than we hear in the plains.

The manner in which words are formed by means of the imitations of natural sounds is illustrated by the word "cock" which is considered by etymologists to be an abbreviated imitation of chanticleer's "cock-a-doodle-doo!" From the name of the animal, which is thus derived from its cry, and then generalized and made fruitful in derivatives, come, by allusion to the bird's pride and strut, the words "coquette," "cockade," the "cock" of a gun, to

"cock" one's eye, to "cock" the head on one side, a "cocked" hat, a "cock" of hay, a "cock"-swain, a "cock"-boat, the "cock" of a balance, and so on. It is in all probability by this method more than by any other, that words were produced in all the earlier stages of language, while the interjectional or exclamatory principle was, doubtless, next in importance.

It is sometimes objected to the theory of the extensive use of onomatopœia in the formation of language, that, were it true, we should find in the different languages of the earth a greater identity than actually exists in the terms expressive of physical facts. We should not find words so unlike as "bang" in English and *pouf* in French, employed to denote the sound of a gun; or *γρύλλος* in Greek, *quirquirra* in the Basque, and *sirsor* in Chinese, used as names for the grasshopper. Why, if the theory in question be true, do we find a clap of thunder called in Sanscrit *vaǵraǵvala*, in Gaelic *tàirneanach*, in Bohemian *hromobitz*, in Icelandic *thruma*? Why does Coleridge sing of the nightingale's "murmurs musical and sweet *jug-jug*," while Tennyson says that "*Whit*, *whit*, *whit*, in the bush beside me, chirrupt the nightingale"?

The answer to this is, that man in naming things does not attempt to reproduce the *identical* sound which he hears, but artistically to reproduce it, or rather the impression which it has made, just as a painter often deviates from the actual colors of nature, and paints a picture more or less ideal, to enhance the effect of his art. The imitation is not a dull, literal echo of the sound, but an echo of the impression produced by it on the human intelligence; not a mere spontaneous repercussion of the perception received, but a repercussion modified *organically* by the

configurations of the mouth, and *ideally* by the nature of the analogy perceived between the sound and the object it expresses.* These repercussions, moreover, have been greatly blurred by the lapse of ages,— so much so, in many cases, as to be indistinguishable. Again, we must remember that the impressions made by the same sounds on different minds, and even on the same mind in different moods, will greatly vary; and that in naming objects from other characteristics than the sound, different characteristics are chosen by different peoples. According to the mental constitution, the preponderance of reason or imagination, for example, in the name-giver, or particular experiences in connection with the object, the designating quality which is deemed most fit to furnish the name for it will vary. Thus it happens that in Sanscrit there is a great variety of names for the elephant, such as the "hand-possessing" animal, the "toothed," the "two-tusked," the "great-toothed," the "pounder," the "roarer," the "forest-roarer," the "mailed," the "twice-drinking," the "mountain-born," the "vagabond," and many others. Thus it happens that in Arabic there are five hundred names for the lion, two hundred for the serpent, and not less than a thousand for the sword. The nightingale is said to have twenty distinct articulations; and if this is true, we should expect that in the different languages of Europe it would have different names. The old poets all speak of the nightingale's song as "most melancholy," but in modern verse we read of

> "the *merry* nightingale
> That crowds and hurries and precipitates
> With fast thick warble its delicious notes."

So with thunder; the impression it makes upon hearers

*"Chapters on Language" by Rev. F. W. Farrar, D.D., F.R.S.

varies with the varying qualities of their minds. To one man it is a dull rumble, to another a crackling explosion, and to a third a sudden flashing of light. As Archdeacon Farrar finely says: "What the eye sees and the ear hears depends in no small measure on the brain and the heart. The hieroglyphics of nature, like the inscriptions on the swords of Vathek, vary with every eye that glances on them; her voices, like the voice of Helen to the ambushed Greeks, take not one tone of their own, but the tone that each hearer loves best to hear," *

Though a large part of language has been formed in the way I have named, yet it must be admitted that few words, compared with the whole number, bear upon their face unmistakable traces of their origin. The explanation of this lies in the great changes which phonetic corruption effects in language. No sooner do men coin a word, than they instinctively and unconsciously seek to rid it of its superfluous letters, and in other ways to economize the time and labor expended upon its utterance; and if they are obliged to use a new or strange word, which conveys no intrinsic meaning to them, they try to give it a meaning by so changing it as to remove its arbitrary character. (See "Words of Illusive Etymology," in Chapter on the "Curiosities of Language.") Thus words, in the course of ages, are rolled and rubbed out of shape, like the pebbles which are rubbed and rounded into smoothness by the sea waves on a shingly beach, until at last, though once plainly imitative, they lose all trace of their sensuous origin. Who, without knowledge of the intermediate *diurnus* and *giorno*, would for a moment suspect that *jour* could be derived from *dies;* or would suppose, if he had not traced

* "Chapters on Language," p. 104.

the etymology of "musket," that it is derived from the onomatope, *musso*, "I buzz"? But, notwithstanding all this, and though in the progress of scientific culture language becomes more and more abstract,—that is, words having no natural connection with the thoughts are used more and more arbitrarily to represent them, just as algebraic signs represent mathematical relations,—still language never loses wholly its original imitative character. It will always, therefore, be a signal excellence of style when thought and emotion are represented by imitative expressions,—that is, by means of pictures or images of sensible things and events. The sound then points to the external object or event, or some sensible property or characteristic of it, and this, again, to the mental state or thought which it is taken to represent. It is for this reason that the poets, from Homer to Tennyson, abound in onomatopes,—in words and combinations of words in which the sound is an echo to the sense. These words are not only the most vivid, the most passionate, and the most picturesque, but they are the only ones which are instantly intelligible, and which possess an inherently graphic power. The power of poetry lies largely in the fact that, as Bunsen says, it "reproduces the original process of the mind in which language originates. The coinage of words is the primitive poem of humanity, and the imagery of poetry and oratory is possible and effective only because it is a continuation of that primitive process which is itself a reproduction of creation."

Dyer, in his "Ruins of Rome," thus exemplifies, in a passage quoted with praise by Johnson, the beauty and force imparted to style by the adaptation of the sounds to the object described:

"The pilgrim oft
At dead of night, 'mid his oraison, hears
Aghast the voice of time; disparting towers
Tumbling all precipitate down dashed,
Rattling around, loud thundering to the moon."

Not only single words, but an entire sentence, or a series of sentences, may resemble the sound represented; as in the following description of the abode of Sleep, in Spenser:

"And more to lull him in his slumbers soft,
A trickling stream from high rocks tumbling downe,
And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
Mixed with a murmuring wind much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swoone:
No other noise, nor people's troublous cries,
As still are wont t' annoy the walléd towne,
Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lies,
Wrapped in eternal silence, far from enemies."

An intelligent writer reminds us that in reading this stanza, we ought to humor it with a corresponding tone of voice, lowering or deepening it, "as though we were going to bed ourselves, or thinking of the rainy night that had lulled us." He suggests also that attention to the accent and pause in the last line will make us feel the depth and distance of the scene. Another illustration is furnished by the well known lines of Pope:

"Soft is the stream when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labors, and the words move slow;
Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the main."

More striking still, in some respects, is Christopher Pitt's translation of the corresponding passage in Vida's "Art of Poetry":

"When things are small the terms should still be so,
For low words please us, when the theme is low.
But when some giant, horrible and grim,
Enormous in his gait, and vast in every limb.
Comes towering on; the swelling words must rise
In just proportion to the monster's size.
If some large weight his huge arms strive to shove,
The verse too labors; the thronged words scarce move.

* * * * *

But if the poem suffer from delay,
Let the lines fly precipitate away;
And when the viper issues from the brake,
Be quick; with stones and brands and fire attack
His rising crest, and drive the serpent back."

The overflowing of the fourth line in this passage, the abrupt termination of the middle of the next line, the pause at "Be quick!" and the rapidity of the last four lines, are exceedingly happy. The illustration of rapid motion is far superior to the last long and sprawling line of Pope, in which the preponderance of liquids and sibilants detains the voice too much, while it is further impeded by the word "unbending,—one of the most sluggish, as Johnson truly says, in the language.

How felicitous are "the hoarse Trinacrian shore" of Milton, and his description of the rapid motion and grating noise with which Hell's gates are opened!—

"On a sudden, open fly
With impetuous recoil, and jarring sound,
The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook
Of Erebus."

What can be more expressive than this representation of the sounds of a battle in ancient times?—

"Arms on armor clashing bray'd
Horrible discord; and the madding wheels
Of brazen chariots raged."

How effective is the pause after the word "shook" in these lines!—

"And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook, but delayed to strike."

Discordant sounds are vividly described in this line from "Lycidas":

"Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw."

Two of the most perfect examples of imitative harmony in our literature are Wordsworth's couplet,

"And see the children shouting on the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore,"

and Byron's vivid description of a storm among the mountains:

"Far along
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
Leaps the live thunder!"

The numerous adaptations of sound to sense in Dryden's "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day" are familiar to all. The following verse, from a song in his "King Arthur," is less hackneyed:

"Come, if you dare, our trumpets sound;
Come, if you dare, our foes rebound;
We come, we come, we come, we come,
Says the double, double, double beat of the thundering drum."

No modern poet has made a more frequent or a more judicious use of onomatopœia than Tennyson. "The Bugle Song," "The Brook," "Tears, Idle Tears," and "Break, Break, Break," will at once occur to the poet's admirers as masterpieces of representative art. The second stanza of the "Bugle Song" has few equals in ancient or modern verse:

'"O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going;
O sweet and far, from cliff and scar,
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!"
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying,
Blow, bugle; answer echoes, dying, dying, dying."

What can be more perfect of its kind than the picture of the shock of a *melée*, when the combatants

"Closed
In conflict with the crash of shivering points,
And thunder . . .
And all the plain,—brand, mace, and shaft, and shield
Shock'd, *like an iron-clanging anvil banged*
With hammers;"

or the picture of a fleet of glass wrecked on a reef of gold, in the lines,—

"For the fleet drew near,
Touched, clinked, and clanked, and vanished."

Motion, as well as sound, has been happily imitated in language,—of which we have signal examples in the progress of Milton's fiend, whose wearisome journey is portrayed by this artful arrangement of words:

"The fiend
O'er bog, or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way,
And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies;"

and in Pope's translation of the noted passage in the "Odyssey" describing Sisyphus:

"With many a step and many a groan,
Up the high hill he heaves a huge round stone;
The huge round stone, *resulting with a bound,*
Thunders impetuous down, and smokes along the ground."

In reading the second line, with its frequent recurrence of the aspirate, one seems to hear the giant pantings and groanings of Sisyphus; and a similar feeling is experienced in reading the following line:

"And when up ten steep slopes you've dragged your thighs."

Crowe, the now forgotten author of "Lewisdon Hill," fairly rivals Pope in the closing line of a version of the foregoing passage in the "Odyssey":

"A sudden force
Turned the curst stone, and, slipping from his hold,
Down again, down the steep rebounding, down it rolled."

An able literary critic,— the Rev. Robert A. Willmott,— has thus contrasted the majestic and easy verse of Dryden with the "mellifluence" of Pope. "'The mellifluence of Pope,' as Johnson called it, has the defect of monotony. Exquisite in the sweet rising and falling of its clauses, it seldom or never takes the ear prisoner by a musical surprise. If Pope be the nightingale of our verse, he displays none of the irregular and unexpected gush of the songster. He has no variations. The tune is delicate, but not natural. It reminds us of a bird, all over brilliant, which pipes its one lay in a golden cage, and has forgotten the green wood in the luxury of confinement. But Dryden's versification has the freedom and the freshness of the fields. . . This is a great charm. He preserved the simple, unpremeditated graces of the earlier couplet, its confluence and monosyllabic close, while he added a dignity and a splendor unknown before. Pope's modulation is of the ear; Dryden's of the subject. He has a different tone for Iphigenia slumbering under trees, by the fountain side; for the startled knight, who listens to strange sounds within the glooms of the wood; and for the courtly Beauty to whom he wafted a compliment."

In the following lines from "Il Penseroso," the effect combines both sound and motion:

"Oft on a plat of rising ground,
I hear the far-off curfew sound,
Over some wide-watered shore,
Swinging slow with sullen roar."

How admirably does the quick and joyous movement of the following lines from "L'Allegro" portray the thing described! —

"Let the merry bells resound
And the jocund rebecks sound,
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequered shade."

Huge, unwieldy bulk, implying slowness of movement, has been happily expressed by Milton in the subjoined passages:

"O'er all the dreary coasts
So, stretched out, huge in length, the arch-fiend lay."

"But ended foul, in many a scaly fold
Voluminous and vast."

How inflated with bulky meaning are these lines from Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida"!—

"The large Achilles, on his pressed bed lolling,
From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause."

The greatest of the Greek and Roman poets have employed those "echoes of nature," the onomatopes, as freely as the modern. Every schoolboy is familiar with the words in which Virgil describes thunder,—"*Iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens*," as well as with those in which he represents the rapid clatter of horses' hoofs:

"*Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*,"

and the vivid words in which Homer recalls the snapping of a sword:

Τριχθί τε καὶ τετραχθὶ διατρύφεν.

Who does not catch the hurtling of battle in the same poet's

σκέπτετ' ὀϊστῶν τε ῥοῖζον καὶ δοῦπον ἀκόντων,

and a murmur of ocean in

ἐξ ἀκαλαῤῥείταο βαθυῤῥόου Ὠκεάνοιο?

A similar effect is produced by his

πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης,

the first word of which was perhaps intended to represent the roaring of the wave as it mounts on the sea-shore, and the second the hissing sound of a receding billow.

Virgil's description of the Cyclopses toiling at the anvil; his picture of the Trojans laboriously hewing the founda-

tions of a tower on the top of Priam's palace, and its sudden and violent fall; Ennius's imitation of a trumpet blast; and the imitation by Aristophanes of the croaking of frogs,— will recur to the classic reader as other examples of the felicitous use of this figure by the Greek and Roman writers.

Paronomasia and alliteration owe their subtle beauty to the fact that in using them the writer has reference to words considered as sounds. Though an excess of either is offensive, yet, charily used, it adds a surprising force to expression. How much is the grandeur of the effect enhanced by the repetition of the *s* in the following lines from Macbeth!—

> "That shall, to all our days and nights to come,
> Give *s*olely *s*overeign *s*way and masterdom."

Dr. Johnson, in speaking of imitative harmony, observes that the desire of discovering frequent adaptations of the sound to the sense "has produced many wild conceits and imaginary beauties." This is only saying that the poet, like the painter, may exaggerate the importance of his accessories, while he gives too little heed to his main theme. But this is no argument against the legitimate use of any subtle or peculiar beauty in either the pictorial or the metrical art. There are many cases where it is impossible to use language which is specific, vivid, and appropriate, without employing imitative words. For the choice of these words no rules can be given; only an instinctive and exquisite taste can enable one to decide when they may be consciously used, and when they should be shunned. But he who can use onomatopœia with skill and judgment,— who can call into play, on proper occasions, that swift and subtle law of association whereby

a reproduction of the sounds at once recalls to the mind the images or circumstances with which they are connected,—has mastered one of the greatest secrets of the writer's art. It was a saying of Shenstone, which experience confirms, that harmony and melody of style have greater weight than is generally imagined in our judgments upon writing and writers; and, as a proof of this, he says that the lines of poetry, the periods of prose, and even the texts of Scripture we most frequently recollect and quote, are those which are preëminently musical. The following magical lines, which owe their interest to the cadence hardly less than to their imagery, illustrate Shenstone's remark:

YOUTH AND AGE.

"Flowers are lovely: Love is flower-like;
Friendship is a sheltering tree;
Oh, the joys that came down shower-like,
Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,
Ere I was old!
Ere I was old! Ah, woful Ere!
Which tells me, Youth's no longer here!
O Youth! for years so many and sweet,
'Tis known that thou and I were one;
I'll think it but a fond conceit—
It cannot be that Thou art gone!
The vesper bell hath not yet tolled,
And thou wert aye a masker bold!
What strange disguise hast now put on,
To make believe that thou art gone?
I see these locks in silvery slips,
This drooping gait, this altered size:
But spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes.
Life is but thought; so think I will,
That Youth and I are house-mates still."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FALLACIES IN WORDS.

Gardons-nous de l'équivoque!—Paul Louis Courier.

Words are grown so false, I am loathe to prove reason with them.—Shakespeare.

The mixture of those things by speech, which by nature are divided, is the mother of all error.—Hooker.

> One vague inflection spoils the whole with doubt;
> One trivial letter ruins all, left out;
> A knot can choke a felon into clay;
> A knot will save him, spelt without the k;
> The smallest word has some unguarded spot,
> And danger lurks in i without a dot.—O. W. Holmes.

ON some of the great American rivers, where lumbering operations are carried on, the logs, in floating down, often get jammed up here and there, and it becomes necessary to find the timber which is a kind of keystone and stops all the rest. Once detach this, and away dash the giant trunks, thundering headlong, helter-skelter, down the rapids. It is just this office which he who defines his terms accurately performs for the dead-locked questions of the day. Half the controversies of the world are disputes about words. How often do we see two persons engage in what Cowper calls "a duel in the form of a debate,"—tilting furiously at each other for hours,—slashing with syllogisms, stabbing with enthymemes, hooking with dilemmas, and riddling with sorites,—with no apparent prospect of ever ending the fray, till suddenly it occurs to one of them to define precisely what he means

by a term on which the discussion hinges; when it is found that the combatants had no cause for quarrel, having agreed in opinion from the beginning! The juggle of all sophistry lies in employing equivocal expressions,—that is, such as may be taken in two different meanings, using a word in one sense in the premises, and in another sense in the conclusion. Frequently the word on which a controversy turns is unconsciously made to do double duty, and under a seeming unity there lurks a real dualism of meaning, from which endless confusions arise. Accurately to define such a term is to provide one's self with a master-key which unlocks the whole dispute.

Who is not familiar with the fierce contests of the Nominalists and Realists, which raged so long in the Middle Ages? Though turning upon refinements of abstraction so subtle that one would think they never could stir in the human bosom the faintest breath of passion, the dispute roused the combatants on both sides to the most frenzied fury. Beginning with words, these two metaphysical sects came at last to blows, and not only shed blood, but even sacrificed lives for the question, whether an abstract name (as *man*, for example) represented any one man in particular, or man in general. Yet, properly understood, they maintained only opposite poles of the same truth; and were, therefore, both right, and both wrong. The Nominalists, it has been said, only denied what no one in his senses would affirm, and the Realists only contended for what no one in his senses would deny; a hair's breadth parted those who, had they understood each other's language, would have had no altercation. Again, who can tell how far the clash of opinions among political economists has been owing to the use in opposite

senses of a very few words? Had Smith, Say, Ricardo, Malthus, M'Culloch, Mill, begun framing their systems by defining carefully the meanings attached by them to certain terms used on every page of their writings,—such as Wealth, Labor, Capital, Value, Supply and Demand, Over-trading,—it may be doubted whether they would not, to some extent, have harmonized in opinion, instead of giving us theories as opposite as the poles.

How many fallacies have grown out of the ambiguity of the word "money," which, instead of being a simple and indivisible term, has at least half-a-dozen different meanings! Money may be either specie, bank-notes, or both together, or credit, or capital, or capital offered for loan. A merchant is said to fail "for lack of money," when, in fact, he fails because he lacks credit, capital, or merchandise, money having no more to do with the matter than the carts or railway wagons by which the merchandise is transported. Again: money is spoken of as yielding "interest," which it cannot do, since wherever it is, whether in a bank, in one's pocket, or in a safe, it is dead capital. The confusion of the terms "wealth" and "money" gave birth to "the mercantile system," one of the greatest curses that ever befell Europe. As in popular language to grow rich is to accumulate "money," and to grow poor is to lose "money," this term became a synonym for "wealth"; and, till recently at least, all the nations of Europe studied every means of accumulating gold and silver in their respective countries. To accomplish this they prohibited the exportation of money, gave bounties on the importation, and restricted the importation of other commodities, expecting thus to produce a "favorable balance of trade,"—a conduct as wise as that of a

shop-keeper who should sell his goods only for money, and hoard every dollar, instead of replacing and increasing his stock, or putting his surplus capital at interest. France, under Colbert, acted upon this principle, and Voltaire extolled his wisdom in thus preferring the accumulation of imperishable bullion to the exchange of it for articles which must, sooner or later, *wear out*. The effect of this fallacy has been to make the nations regard the wealth of their customers as a source of loss instead of profit, and an advantageous market as a curse instead of a blessing, by which errors the improvement of Europe has been more retarded than by all other causes put together.

So with the mortal theological wars in which so much ink has been shed. Who has not read of the disputes between the Arians and Semi-Arians and their enemies, when orthodoxy became so nice that a slip in a single expression, the use or omission of a single word, sufficed to make a man a heretic,— when every heresy produced a new creed, and every creed a new heresy? The shelves of our public libraries groan under the weight of huge folios and quartos once hurled at each other by the giants of divinity, which never would have been published but for their confused notions, or failure to discriminate the meaning, of certain technical and oft-recurring terms. Beginning with discordant ideas of what is meant by the words Will, Necessity, Unity, Law, Person,— terms vital in theology,— the more they argued, the farther they were apart, and while fancying they were battling with real adversaries, were, Quixote-like, tilting at windmills, or fighting with shadows, till at last utter

> "Confusion umpire sat,
> And by deciding worse embroiled the fray."

The whole vast science of casuistry, which once occupied the brains and tongues of the Schoolmen, turned upon nice, hair-splitting verbal distinctions, as ridiculous as the disputes of the orthodox Liliputians and the heretical Blefuscudians about the big ends and the little ends of the eggs. The readers of Pascal will remember the fierce wars in the Sorbonne between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, touching the doctrine of "efficacious" and "sufficient" grace. The question was, "Whether all men received from God *sufficient grace* for their conversion." The Jesuits maintained the affirmative; the Jansenists insisted that this *sufficient* grace would never be *efficacious*, unless accompanied by *special* grace. "Then the *sufficient* grace, which is not *efficacious*, is a contradiction in terms," cried the Jesuits; "and, besides, it is a heresy!" We need not trace the history of the logomachy that followed, which Pascal has immortalized in his "Provincial Letters,"—letters which De Maistre denounces as "Les Menteurs," but which the Jesuits found to be both "sufficient" and "efficacious" for their utter discomfiture. The theological student will recall the microscopic distinctions; the fine-spun attenuations; the spider-like threads of meaning; the delicate, infinitesimal verbal shavings of the grave and angelic doctors; how one subtle disputant, with syllabical penetration, would discover a heresy in his opponent's monosyllables, while the other would detect a schism in his antagonist's conjunctions, till finally, after having filled volumes enough with the controversy to form a library, the microscopic point at issue, which had long been invisible, was whittled down to nothing.

A controversy not less memorable was that which raged in the church in the third and fourth centuries between

the "Homoousians" and the "Homoiusians" concerning the nature of Christ. The former maintained that Christ was of the *same* essence with the Father; the latter that he was of *like* essence,—a dispute which Boileau has satirized in these witty lines:

> "D'une *syllabe* impie un saint *mot* augmenté
> Remplit tous les esprits d'aigreurs si meurtrières—
> Tu fis, dans une guerre et si triste et si longue,
> Périr tant de Chrétiens, *martyrs d'une diphthongue!*"

The determination of the controversy depended on the retention or rejection of the diphthong *oi*, or rather upon the change of the letter *o* into *i*; and hence it has been asserted that for centuries Christians fought like tigers, and tore each other to pieces, on account of a single letter. It must be admitted, however, that the dispute, though it related to a mystery above human comprehension, was something more than a verbal one; and though it is easy to ridicule "microscopic theology," yet it is evident that if error employs it, truth must do the same, even if the distinction be as small as the difference between two animalcules fighting each other among a billion of fellows in a drop of water.

Another famous theological controversy was that concerning the doctrine of the Double Procession, which, though mainly a verbal dispute, tore asunder the Eastern and Western Churches, gave the chief occasion for the anathemas of the Athanasian creed, precipitated the fall of the Empire of Constantinople, and, it has been asserted, sowed the original seed of the present perplexing Eastern Question.

To how many discussions has that ambiguous phrase, "the Church," given rise! It has been shown that in all

countries where there is a religious establishment supported by law, this phrase may have six different meanings. A Romanist understands by "the Church" his own communion, with the hierarchy and papal head; a Protestant includes within "the Church" all sincere and devout Christians of every denomination. A Romanist, again, understands "priest" to refer to a sacrificial priesthood; a Presbyterian regards it as derived from "presbyter," and to mean simply "elder."

Disraeli remarks, in his "Curiosities of Literature," that there have been few councils or synods where the addition or omission of a word or a phrase might not have terminated an interminable logomachy. "At the Council of Basle, for the convenience of the disputants, John de Secubia drew up a treatise of *undeclined words*, chiefly to determine the significations of the particles *from*, *by*, *but*, and *except*, which, it seems, were perpetually occasioning fresh disputes among the Hussites and Bohemians. . . In modern times the popes have more skilfully freed the church from the 'confusion of words.' His holiness on one occasion, standing in equal terror of the Court of France, who protected the Jesuits, and of the Court of Spain, who maintained the cause of the Dominicans, contrived a phrase, where a comma or a full stop, placed at the beginning or the end, purported that his holiness tolerated the opinions which he condemned; and when the rival parties dispatched deputations to the Court of Rome to plead for the period, or advocate the comma, his holiness, in this 'confusion of words,' flung an unpunctuated copy to the parties; nor was it his fault, but that of the spirit of party, if the rage of the one could not subside into a comma, nor that of the other close by a full period!"

It has been truly said by a Scotch divine that the vehemence of theological controversy has been generally proportional to the emptiness of the party phrases used. It is probable that in nine cases out of ten accurate definitions of the chief terms in dispute would have made the most celebrated controversies impossible. It is stated by the biographer of Dr. Chalmers that that eminent divine and Dr. Stuart met one day in Edinburgh, and engaged in a long and eager conversation on *saving grace*. Street after street was paced, and argument after argument was vigorously plied. At last, his time or his patience exhausted, Chalmers broke off the interview; but, as at parting he shook his opponent by the hand, he said: "If you wish to see my views stated clearly and distinctly, read a tract called 'Hindrances to Believing the Gospel.'" "Why," exclaimed Stuart, "that's the very tract I published myself!"

As in theology, so in philosophy, words used without precision have been at the bottom of nearly all controversies. How often such terms as Nature, Necessity, Freedom, Law, Body, Matter, Substance, Revelation, Inspiration, Knowledge, Belief, Finite, and Infinite, are tossed about in the wars of words, as if everybody knew their meaning, and as if all the disputants used them in exactly the same sense! Max Müller sensibly observes that people will fight and call each other very hard names for denying or asserting certain opinions about the Supernatural, who would consider it impertinent if they were asked to define what they mean by the Supernatural, and who have never even clearly perceived the meaning of Nature. The same writer shows that the words "to know" and "to believe," the meanings of which seem so obvious, are each used, in modern languages, in three distinct senses. When we

speak of our belief in God, or in the immortality of the soul, we want to express a certainty independent of sense, evidence and reason, yet more convincing than either. But when we say that we believe Our Lord suffered under Pontius Pilate, or lived during the reign of Augustus, we do not mean to say that we believe this with the same belief as the existence of God, or the immortality of the soul. Our assent, in this case, is based on historical evidence, which is only a subdivision of sense evidence, supplemented by the evidence of reason. When, thirdly, we say, "I believe it is going to rain," "I believe" means no more than "I guess." The same word, therefore, "conveys the highest as well as the lowest degree of certainty that can be predicated of the various experiences of the human mind, and the confusion produced by its promiscuous employment has caused some of the most violent controversies in matters of religion and philosophy." *

The art of treaty-making appears once to have consisted in a kind of verbal sleight-of-hand; and the most dexterous diplomatist was he who had always "an *arrière pensée*, which might fasten or loosen the ambiguous expression he had so cautiously and so finely inlaid in the mosaic of treachery." When the American colonies refused to be taxed by Great Britain, on the ground that they were not represented in the House of Commons, a new term, "*virtual* representation," was invented to silence their clamors. The sophism was an ingenious one; but it cost the mother country a hundred millions sterling, forty thousand lives, and the most valuable of her colonial possessions.

Hume's famous argument against miracles is based

* "Lectures on the Science of Language," Second Series, pp. 592–6.

entirely upon a *petitio principii*, or begging of the question, artfully concealed in an ambiguous use of the word "experience." In all our experience, he argues, we have never known the laws of nature to be violated; on the other hand, we have had experience, again and again, of the falsity of testimony; consequently we ought to believe that any amount of testimony is false rather than admit the occurrence of a miracle. But *whose* experience does Hume mean? Does he mean the experience of *all* the men that ever lived? If so, he palpably begs the very question in dispute. Does he mean that a miracle is contrary to the experience of *each individual* who has never seen one? This would lead to the absurdest consequences. Not only was the King of Bantam justified in listening to no evidence for the existence of ice, but no man would be authorized, on this principle, to expect his own death. His experience informs him directly, only that *others* have died; and, as he has invariably recovered when attacked by disease himself, why, judging by his experience, should he expect any future sickness to be mortal? If, again, Hume means only that a miracle is contrary to the experience of *men generally*, as to what is common and of ordinary occurrence, the maxim will only amount to this, that false testimony is a thing of common occurrence, and that miracles are not. This is true enough; but "too general to authorize of itself a conclusion in any particular case. In any other individual question as to the admissibility of evidence, it would be reckoned absurd to consider merely the average chances for the truth of testimony in the abstract, without inquiring what the testimony is, in the particular instance before us. As if, *e.g.*, any one had maintained that no testimony could establish Colum-

bus's account of the discovery of America, because it is more common for travellers to lie than for new continents to be discovered."*

Again, the terms "experience" and "contrary to experience," imply a contradiction fatal to the whole argument. It is clear that a revelation cannot be founded, as regards the external proof of its reality, upon anything else than miracles; and these events *must* be, in a sense, contrary to nature, *as known to us*, by the very definition of the word. If they entered into the ordinary operations of nature,—that is, were subjects of experience,—they would no longer be miracles.

In the very phrase "a violation of nature," so cunningly used by sceptics, there lurks a sophism. The expression seems to imply that there are effects that have no cause; or, at least, effects whose cause is foreign to the universe. But if miracles disturb or interrupt the established order of things, they do so only in the same way that the will of man continually breaks in upon the order of nature. There is not a day, an hour, or a minute, in which man, in his contact with the material world, does not divert its course, or give a new direction to its order. The order of nature allows an apple-tree to produce fruit; but man can girdle the tree, and prevent it from bearing apples. The order of nature allows a bird to wing its flight from tree to tree; but the sportsman's rifle brings the bird to the dust. Yet, in spite of this, it is asserted that the smallest conceivable intervention, disturbing the fated order of nature, linked as are its parts indissolubly from eternity in one chain, must break up the entire system of the universe! "If only the free will of man be

*Whately's Logic.

acknowledged, then" as an able writer says, "this entire sophism comes down in worthless fragments. So long as we allow ourselves to speak *as theists*, then miracles which we attribute to the *will*, the *purpose*, the *power* of God, are not in any sense violations of nature; or they are so in the same sense in which the entireness of our human existence,—our active converse with the material world from morning to night of every day,—is also a violation of nature." The truth is, however, that miracles are not properly violations of the laws of nature, but suspensions of them, or rather intercalations of higher and immediate operations of God's power, in place of the ordinary development of those laws. An eminent scientist finds a rough illustration of this in the famous Strasburg clock. He stood one day, and watched it steadily marking the seconds, minutes, hours, days of the week, and phases of the moon, when suddenly the figure of an angel turned up his hour-glass, another struck four times, and Death struck twelve times with metal marrow-bones to indicate noon; various figures passed in and out of the doorways; the twelve Apostles marched, one by one, before the figure of their Master, and a brass cock three times flapped its wings, threw back its head, and crowed. "All this," says the scientist, "was as much a part of the designer's plan as the ordinary marking of time, and he had provided for it in advance, and the machinery for its execution was so arranged as to come into play at a definite moment. So God may have prepared the universe from the beginning with a view to miracles, may have ordered its laws in such a manner that at the predetermined hour in His providence these wonderful phenomena should appear, and bear convincing testimony to His own power and greatness."

A further and not less fatal objection to Hume's argument is that it confounds the distinction between testimony and authority, between the veracity of a witness and his competency. The miraculous character of an event is not a matter of intuition or observation, but of inference, and cannot be decided by testimony, but only by reasoning from the probabilities of the case. The testimony relates only to the *happening of the event*; the question concerning the *nature* of this event, whether it is, or is not, a violation of physical law, can only be determined by the judgment, after weighing all the circumstances of the case. No event whatever, viewed simply as an event, as an external phenomenon, can be so marvellous that sufficient testimony will not convince us that it has really occurred. A thousand years ago the conversion of five loaves of bread into as many hundred, or the raising of a dead man to life, would not have appeared more incredible than the transmission of a written message five thousand miles, without error, within a minute of time, or from Europe to America, under the waters of the Atlantic; yet these feats, miraculous as they would once have seemed, have been accomplished by the electric telegraph. Hume's argument against miracles, therefore, which is based entirely upon an appeal to experience and testimony, without reference to the *competency* of the conclusion that the events testified to were supernatural, is altogether inapplicable.

Hume's argument reminds us of the fallacies that lurk in the word "Nature," and the phrase "Law of Nature." Etymologically, "Nature" means she who gives birth, or who brings forth. But what is she? Is she an independent power, a being endowed with intelligence and will? Or is it not evidently a mere figure of speech, when we personify

Nature, and speak of her works and her laws? "It is easy," says Cuvier, "to see the puerility of those philosophers who have conferred on Nature a kind of individual existence, distinct from the Creator, from the laws which He has imposed on the movement, and from the properties and forms which He has given to His creatures; and who represent Nature as acting on matter by means of her own power and reason." Again, the phrase "Law of Nature" is sometimes used as if it were equivalent to *efficient cause*. There are persons who attempt to account for the phenomena of the universe by the mere agency of physical laws, when there is no such agency, except as a figure of speech. A "Law of Nature" is only a general statement concerning a large number of similar individual facts, which it describes, but in no way *accounts for*, or explains. It is not the Law of Gravitation which *causes* a stone thrown into the air to fall to the earth; but the fact that the stone so falls is classed with many other facts, which are comprehended under the general statement called the "Law of Gravitation." "Second causes," as physical laws are sometimes called, "are no causes at all; they are mere fictions of the intellect, and exist only in thought. A *cause*, in the proper sense of the word, that is, an *efficient* cause, as original and direct in its action, must be a *first* cause; that through which its action is transmitted is not a cause, but a portion of the *effect*,—as it does not act, but is acted upon." *

The changes of meaning which words undergo in the lapse of time, and the different senses in which the same word is used in different countries, are a fruitful source of misunderstanding and error. Hence in reading an old

* Bowen's "Logic," p. 432.

author it is necessary to be constantly on our guard lest our interpretations of his words involve a gross anachronism, because his "pure ideas" have become our "mixed modes." The titles of "tyrant," "sophist," "parasite," were originally honorable distinctions; and to attach to them their modern significations would give us wholly false ideas of ancient history. When Bishop Watson, in defending Christianity and the Bible from the attacks of Gibbon and Thomas Paine, entitled his books "An Apology for Christianity," and "An Apology for the Bible," he used the word "apology" in its primitive sense of "a defence," as Plato had used it in his "Apologia Socratis," and Quadratus in his "Apology for Christianity" to the Emperor Adrian; but the author was probably understood by many of his readers to be offering an *excuse* for the Christian system and for the faults of the Scriptures, instead of a vindication of their truth. "Apology for the Bible!" exclaimed George the Third, on hearing of the book; "the Bible needs no apology." When we find an old English writer characterizing his opponent's argument as "impertinent," we are apt to attach to the word the idea of insolence or rudeness; whereas the meaning is simply "not pertinent" to the question. So a magistrate who "'indifferently' administered justice" meant formerly a magistrate who administered justice "impartially."

Were we to use the word "gravitation" in translating certain passages of ancient authors, we should assert that the great discovery of Newton had been anticipated by hundreds of years, though we know that these authors had never dreamed of the law which that word recalls to our minds. Most of the terminology of the Christian church is made up of words that once had a more general mean-

ing. "Bishop" meant originally overseer; "priest," or "presbyter," meant elder; "deacon" meant administrator; and "sacrament," a vow of allegiance. In reading the passage in the Athanasian Creed where the persons of the Trinity are spoken of as the Father "incomprehensible," the Son "incomprehensible," and the Holy Ghost "incomprehensible," almost all persons suppose the word "incomprehensible" to mean "inconceivable," or beyond or above the human understanding. But when the Creed was translated into English from the Latin, the word meant simply "not comprehended within any limits," and corresponded to the term "immense," used in the original. In studying the Greek and Latin classics, we shall be continually led into error, unless we note the difference between the meanings attached in them to certain terms, and those we now attach to corresponding terms. Thus the "God" denoted by the Greek and Latin words which we so translate, was not the eternal Maker and Governor of the Universe, whom Christians worship, but a being such as our Pagan forefathers worshipped. In reading the history of France, an American or Englishman is constantly in danger of misapprehension by associating with certain words common to the French and English languages similar ideas. When he reads of *Parliaments* or the *Noblesse*, he is apt to suppose that they resembled the Parliaments and Nobility of England, when their constitution was altogether different. To confound them is like confounding a Jacobin and a Jacobite, a French *vicaire* with an English vicar, or a French *gouvernante* with an English governess. The list is almost endless of words, which, derived from the same Latin term,

connote one class of ideas in French and another in English.

Mr. J. S. Mill observes that historians, travellers, and all who write or speak concerning moral and social phenomena with which they are unacquainted, are apt to confound in their descriptions things wholly diverse. Having but a scanty vocabulary of words relating to such phenomena, and never having analyzed the facts to which these words correspond in their own country, they apply them to other facts to which they are more or less inapplicable. Thus, as I have before briefly stated, the first English conquerors of Bengal carried with them the phrase "landed proprietor" into a country where the rights of individuals over the soil were extremely different in degree, and even in nature, from those recognized in England. Applying the term with all its English associations in such a state of things, to one who had only a limited right they gave an absolute right; from another, because he had not an absolute right, they took away all right; drove whole classes of men to ruin and despair; filled the country with banditti; created a feeling that nothing was secure; and produced, with the best intentions, a disorganization which had not been produced in that country by the most ruthless of its barbarian invaders.*

How often, in reading ancient history, are we misled by the application of modern terms to past institutions and events! Guizot, in speaking of the towns of Europe between the fifth and tenth centuries, cautions his readers against concluding that their state was one either of positive servitude or of positive freedom. He observes that when a society and its language have lasted a considerable

* "Logic," Book IV., Chap. 5.

time, its words acquire a complete, determinate, and precise meaning,— a kind of legal official signification. Time has introduced into the signification of every term a thousand ideas, which are suggested to us every time we hear it pronounced, but which, as they do not all bear the same date, are not all suitable at the same time. Thus the terms "servitude" and "freedom" recall to our minds ideas far more precise and definite than the facts of the eighth, ninth, or tenth centuries, to which they relate. Whether we say that the towns in the eighth century were in a state of "freedom" or in a state of "servitude," we say, in either case, too much; for they were a prey to the rapacity of the strong, and yet maintained a certain degree of independence and importance.

So, again, as the same writer shows, the term "civilization" comprises more or fewer ideas, according to the sense, popular or scientific, in which it is used. "The popular signification of a word is formed by degrees, and while all the facts it represents are present. As often as a fact comes before us which seems to answer to the signification of a known term, this term is naturally applied to it, and thus its signification goes on broadening and deepening, till, at last, all the various facts and ideas which, from the nature of things, ought to be brought together and embodied in the term, are collected and embodied in it. When, on the contrary, the signification of a word is determined by science, it is usually done by one or a very few individuals, who, at the time, are under the influence of some particular fact, which has taken possession of their imagination. Thus it comes to pass that scientific definitions are, in general, much narrower, and, on that very

account, much less correct, than the popular significations given to words."

It is this continual incorporation of new facts and ideas, — circumstances originally accidental,— into the permanent significations of words, which makes the dictionary definition of a word so poor an exponent of its real meaning. For a time this definition suffices; but in the lapse of time many nice distinctions and subtle shades of meaning adhere to the word, which whoever attempts to use it with no other guide than the dictionary is sure to confound. Hence the ludicrous blunders made by foreigners, whose knowledge of a language is gained only from books; and hence the reason why, in any language, there are so few exact synonyms.

How many persons who oppose compulsory education, have been frightened by the word "compulsory," attaching to it ideas of tyranny and degradation! How many persons are there in every community, who, in the language of Milton,

> "Bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
> And still revolt when the truth would make them free;
> *License* they mean when they cry *liberty*,
> For who love that, must first be wise and good."

Who can estimate the amount of mischief which has been done to society by such phrases as "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," and other such "rabble-charming words," as South calls them, "which have so much wildfire wrapped up in them"? How many persons who declaim passionately about "the majesty of the people," "the sovereignty of the people," have ever formed for themselves any definite conceptions of what they mean by these expressions? Locke has well said of those who have the words "wisdom," "glory," "grace," constantly at their tongue's end,

that if they should be asked what they mean by them, they would be at a stand, and know not what to answer. Even Locke himself, who has written so ably on the abuse of words, has used some of the cardinal and vital terms in his philosophy in different senses. La Harpe says that the express object of the entire "Essay on the Human Understanding" is to demonstrate rigorously that *l'entendement est esprit et d'une nature essentiellement distincte de la matière;* yet the author has used the words "reflection," "mind," "spirit," so vaguely that he has been accused of holding doctrines subversive of all moral distinctions. Even the eagle eye of Newton could not penetrate the obscurity of Locke's language, and on reading the "Essay" he took its author for a Hobbist. De Maistre declares the title a misnomer; instead of being called an "Essay on the Human Understanding," it should be entitled, he thinks, an "Essay on the Understanding of Locke."

Again, what an amount of error is wrapped up in what have been called the regulation-labels of philosophy; as, for example, when a writer is called a "pantheist" in religion, an "intuitionist" in ethics, an "absolutist" in politics, etc., etc.! Classifications of this sort, made, as they generally are, without judgment, discrimination, or qualification, are the greatest foes of true knowledge. It is probable that in nine cases out of ten, the persons who confidently label Mr. Emerson as a "pantheist" or "intuitionist," could neither define these terms accurately, nor put their fingers upon the passages in his writings which are supposed to justify their use.

Professor Bowen notices a fallacy in a certain use of the word "tend." When there is more than an even chance that a given result will occur, we may properly

say that it "tends" to happen; if there is less than an even chance, it "tends" *not* to happen. Thus, *all* persons who have attained the age of twenty-four survive, *on an average*, till they are sixty-two years old. But *no one person*, now aged twenty-four, has a right to expect that this average will be exemplified in his particular case. *All*, collectively, "tend" to the average; but no *one* "tends" to the average. Mr. Darwin, in his "Origin of Species by Natural Selection," bases his theory on a fallacy in the use of the word "tend." "He first argues that the specific Marks of Species, both in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, 'tend' to vary, because, perhaps in one case out of ten thousand, a child is born with six fingers on one hand, or a cat with blue eyes, or a flower grows out of the middle of another flower. Collecting many instances of such sports of nature or monstrosities, he bases his whole theory upon them, forgetting that the vastly larger number of normal growths and developments proves that the 'tendency' is to *non-variation*. Then, secondly, because, perhaps, one out of a hundred of these abnormal Marks is transmitted by inheritance, he assumes that these freaks of nature *tend* to perpetuate themselves in a distinct race, and thus to become permanent Marks of distinct species. Thirdly, as either of the two preceding points, taken singly, affords no basis whatever for his doctrine, he assumes that their *joint* occurrence is probable, because he has made out what is, in truth, a very faint probability that each may *separately* happen. But if the chance of a variation in the first instance is only one out of a thousand, and that of the anomaly being handed down by descent is one out of a hundred, the probability of a variation established by inheritance is but one out of a hundred

thousand. As the theory further requires the *cumulation* of an indefinite number of such variations, one upon another, the formation of a new species by the Darwinian process may safely be pronounced to be incredible."

In treating of the difference between "the disgraceful" and "the indecent," Archbishop Whately observes that the Greeks and the Romans, unfortunately, had not, like ourselves, a separate word for each; *turpe* and *αἰσχρὸς* served to express both. Upon this ambiguity some of the ancient philosophers, especially the Cynics, founded paradoxes, by which they bewildered themselves and their hearers. It is an interesting fact that the Saxon part of our language, containing a smaller percentage of synonymous words that are liable to be confounded, is much freer from equivocation than the Romanic. Of four hundred and fifty words discriminated by Whately, in his treatise on synonyms, less than ninety are Anglo-Saxon. On the other hand, it has been noted by the same writer that the double origin of our language, from Saxon and Norman, often enables a sophist to seem to render a reason, when he is only repeating the assertion in synonymous words of a different family: *e.g.*, "To allow every man an unbounded freedom of speech must be always, on the whole, highly advantageous to the State; for it is extremely conducive to the interests of the community that each individual should enjoy a liberty perfectly unlimited of expressing his sentiments." So the physician in Molière accounted for opium producing sleep by saying that it had a soporific virtue. Again, there is a large class of words employed indiscriminately, neither because they express precisely the same ideas, nor because they enable the sophist to confound things that are essentially different,

but because they convey no distinct ideas whatever, except of the moral character of him who uses them. "*Il m'appelle*," says Paul Louis Courier, speaking of an opponent, "*jacobin, révolutionnaire, plagiaire, voleur, empoissonneur, faussaire, pestiféré ou pestifère, enragé, imposteur, calomniateur, libelliste, homme horrible, ordurier, grimacier, chiffonnier, . . . Je vois ce qu'il veut dire; il entend que lui et moi sommes d'avis différent.*"

It is an old trick of controversialists, noticed in a previous chapter, to employ "question-begging" words that determine disputes summarily without facts or arguments. Thus political parties and religious sects quietly beg the questions at issue between them by dubbing themselves "the Democrats" and "the Republicans", or "the Orthodox" and "the Liberals"; though the orthodoxy of the one may consist only in opposition to somebody else's doxy, and the liberality of the other may differ from bigotry only in the fact that the bigots are liberal only to *one* set of opinions, while the Liberals are bigoted against all. So with the argument of what is called the Selfish School of Moral Philosophers, who deny that man ever acts from purely disinterested motives. The whole superstructure of their degrading theory rests upon a confounding of the term "self-love" with "selfishness." If I go out to walk, and, being overtaken by a shower, spread my umbrella to save myself from a wetting, never once, all the while, thinking of my friends, my country, or of anybody, in short, but myself, will it be pretended that this act, though performed exclusively for self, was in any sense selfish? As well might you say that the cultivation of an "art" makes a man "artful"; that one who gets his living by any "craft" is necessarily "crafty"; that a man skilled in "design" is a

"designing" man; or that a man who forms a "project" is, therefore, a "projector."

Derivatives do not always retain the force of their primitives. Wearing woolen clothes does not make a man sheepish. A representative does not, and *should* not, always represent the will of his constituents (that is, in the sense of voting as they wish, or being their mere *spokesman*); for they may clamor for measures opposed to the Constitution, which he has sworn to support. Self-love, in the highest degree, implies no disregard of the rights of others; whereas Selfishness is always sacrificing others to itself,—it contains the germ of every crime, and fires its neighbor's house to roast its own eggs.

What towering structures of fallacy conservatives have often built upon the twofold meaning of the word "old"! Strictly, it denotes the *length* of time that any object has existed; but it is often employed, instead of "ancient," to denote *distance* of time. Because old men are generally the wisest and most experienced, opinions and practices handed down to us from the "old times" of ignorance and superstition, when the world was comparatively in its youth, it is thought must be entitled to the highest respect. The truth is, as Sydney Smith says, "of living men the oldest has, *ceteris paribus*, the most experience; of generations, the oldest has the least experience. Our ancestors, up to the Conquest, were children in arms; chubby boys in the time of Edward the First; striplings under Elizabeth; men in the reign of Queen Anne; and we only are the white-bearded, silver-headed ancients, who have treasured up, and are prepared to profit by, all the experience which human life can supply." Again, how many tedious books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles have been written to

prove that education should consist of mental discipline,— founded on an erroneous derivation of the word from *educere*, "to draw out." Does education, it is asked, consist in filling the child's mind as a cistern is filled with water brought in buckets from some other source, or in the opening up of its own fountains? The fact is, education comes not from *educere*, but from *educare*, which means "to nourish," "to foster," to do just what the nurse does. *Educit obstetrix*, says Cicero, *educat nutrix*, *instituit pædagogus*. It is food, above all things, which the growing mind craves; and the mind's food is knowledge. Discipline, training, healthful development is, indeed, necessary, but it should form a part only, not usurp the lion's share, of education. In an ideal system this and the nourishing of the mind by wholesome knowledge would proceed simultaneously. The school lesson would *feed* the mind, while the thorough, patient and conscientious acquisition of it would *gymnaze* the intellect and strengthen the moral force. Why have one class of studies for discipline only, and another class for nourishment only, when there are studies which at once fill the mind with the materials of thinking, and develop the power of thought,— which, at the same time, impart useful knowledge, and afford an intellectual gymnastic? Is a merchant, whose business compels him to walk a dozen miles a day, to be told that he must walk another dozen for the sake of exercise, and for that alone? Yet not less preposterous, it seems to us, is the reasoning of a class of educators who would range on one side the practically useful and on the other the educational, and build high between them a partition wall.

If a man, by mastering Chillingworth, learns how to reason logically at the same time that he learns the princi-

ples of Protestantism, must he study logic in Whately or Jevens? One of the disadvantages of an education of which discipline, pure and simple, is made the end, is that the discipline, being disagreeable, too often ends with the school-days; whereas the discipline gained agreeably, instead of being associated with disgust, would be continued through life. It is possible that the muscular discipline which the gymnasium gives is greater while it lasts than that which is gained by a blacksmith or other laborer in his daily work; but whose muscles are more developed, the man's who practises a few months or years in a gymnasium, or the man's whose calling compels him to use his muscles all his life? What would the graduate of the gymnasium do, if hugged by a London coal-heaver?

Again, the reader of Macaulay's "History of England" will recollect the hot and long-protracted debates in Parliament in 1696, upon the question whether James II had "abdicated" or "deserted" the crown,—the Lords insisting upon the former, the Commons upon the latter, term. He will also recall the eloquent and fierce debate by the Lords upon the motion that they should subscribe an instrument, to which the Commons had subscribed, recognizing William as "rightful and lawful king of England." This they refused to do, but voted to declare that he had the right by law to the English crown, and that no other person had any right whatever to that crown. The distinction between the two propositions, observes Macaulay, a Whig may, without any painful sense of shame, acknowledge to be beyond the reach of his faculties, and leave to be discussed by high churchmen. The distinction between "abdicate" and "desert," however, is an important one, obvious almost at a glance. Had Parliament declared

that James had "deserted" the throne, they would have admitted that it was not only his right, but his duty, to return, as in the case of a husband who had deserted his wife, or a soldier who had deserted his post. By declaring that he had "abdicated" the throne, they virtually asserted that he had voluntarily relinquished the crown, and forfeited all right to it forever.

Among the ambiguous words which at this day lead to confusion of thought, one of the most prominent is the word, "unity." There are not a few Christians who confound what the Apostles say concerning "unity" of spirit, faith, etc., with unity of church government, and infer, because the church,—that is, the church universal,—is *one*, as having one common Head, one Spirit, one Father, it must, therefore, be one as a *society*. "Church unity" is a good thing, so long as it does not involve the sacrifice of a denomination's life or principles; but there are cases where it amounts to absorption. It sometimes resembles too closely that peculiar union which the boa-constrictor is so fond of consummating between itself and the goat. It is exceedingly fond of goats; but when the union is complete, there is not a trace of the goat,—it is all boa-constrictor.

Hardly any ambiguous word has been more fruitful of controversy than the word "person," as used in the phrase, "the three Persons of the Trinity." If there are three Persons, or personalities, in the Trinity, then there must be, it is argued, three Gods. It is true, the word "person" implies a numerically distinct substance; but the theological meaning is very different. The word is derived from the Latin *persona*, which denotes the state, quality, or condition, whereby one man differs from another, as shown

by the phrases *personam induere*, *personam agere*, etc. Cicero says: "*Tres personas unus sustineo; meam, adversarii, judicis;* I, being one, sustain three characters, my own, that of my client, and that of the judge." Archbishop Whately thinks it probable that the Latin fathers meant by "person" to convey the same idea as did the Greek theologians by the word "hypostasis,"—that which stands under (*i.e.*, is the subject of) attributes.

The confusion of "opposite" and "contrary" is a source of not a little fallacious reasoning in ethics and in politics. In every good system of government there are contrivances and adjustments by which a force acting in one direction may, at a certain point, be met and arrested by an opposite force. We see this illustrated by the "governor" of a steam engine, by which the supply of steam is checked as the velocity is increased, and enlarged as the velocity is diminished. This system of "checks and balances," as it is termed, is often sneered at by theoretical politicians, simply because they do not discriminate between things "opposite" and things "contrary." Things "opposite" complete each other, their action producing a common result compounded of the two; things "contrary" antagonize and exclude each other. The most "opposite" mental or moral qualities may meet in the same person; but "contrary" qualities, of course, cannot. The right hand and the left are "opposites"; but right and wrong are "contraries." Sweet and sour are "opposites"; sweet and bitter are "contraries." As it has been happily said, "opposites" unfold themselves in different directions from the same root, as the positive and negative forces of electricity, and in their very opposition uphold and sustain one another; while "contraries" en-

counter one another from quarters quite diverse, and one subsists only in the exact degree that it puts out of working the other.

Not a few of our English particles are equivocal in their signification, especially "and" and "or." The dual meaning of the latter particle, which may imply either that two objects or propositions are equivalent, if not identical, or that they are unlike, if not contradictory, is a fruitful source of misunderstanding and confusion. The conjunction "and" is hardly less indefinite and equivocal. This is illustrated in the case of *Stradling vs. Stiles*, in "Martinus Scriblerus," familiar to the readers of Pope, where, in a supposed will, a testator, possessed of six black horses, six white horses, and six pied, or black-and-white horses, bequeathed to A. B. "all my black and white horses." The question, thereupon, rose whether the bequest carried the black horses, and the white horses, or the black-and-white horses only. The equivocation could have been avoided by writing "all my black and all my white horses," or, "all my pied horses"; still, it is evident that our language needs a new conjunctive.

Sir William Hamilton points out a defect in our philosophical language, in which the terms "idea," "conception," "notion," are used as almost convertible to denote objects so different as the images of sense and the unpicturable notions of intelligence. The confusion thus produced is avoided in the German, "the richest in metaphysical expressions of any living tongues," in which the two kinds of objects are carefully distinguished.

Again, how many systems of error in metaphysics and ethics have been based upon the etymologies of words, the sophist assuming that the meaning of a word must always

be that which it, or its root, originally bore! Thus Horne Tooke tries to prove by a wide induction that since all particles,—that is, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions,—were originally nouns and verbs, they must be so still; a species of logic which would prove that man, if the Darwinian theory be true, is still a reptile. In a similar way the same writer has reached the conclusion that there is no eternal truth, since "truth," according to its etymology, is simply what one "troweth," that is, what one thinks or believes. This theory, it is thought, was suggested to Tooke by a conjecture that "if" is equivalent to "gif," an imperative of the verb "to give"; but as it has been shown, from cognate forms in other languages, that this particle has no connection with the verb "to give," or any other verb, any system founded on this basis is a mere castle in the air. Truth, argues Tooke, supposes mankind; for whom, and *by* whom alone the word is formed, and to whom alone it is applicable. "If no man, then no truth. There is no such thing as eternal, immutable, everlasting truth, unless mankind, *such as they are at present*, be also eternal, immutable, and everlasting. Two persons may contradict each other, and yet both speak truth, for the truth of one person may be opposite to the truth of another."

Even if we admit this derivation of "truth," the conclusion does not follow; for whatever the word once meant, it now means that which is certain, whether we think it or not. If we are to be governed wholly by etymology, we must maintain that a "beldam" is a "fine lady," that "priest" can mean only "advanced in years," and that "Pontifex" can only signify "a bridge-builder." But Horne Tooke's etymology has been disputed by the very

highest authority. According to Mr. Garnett, an acute English philologist, "truth" is derived "from the Sanscrit *dhru*, 'to be established,'—*fixum esse;* whence *dhruwa*, 'certain,' *i.e.* 'established'; German, *trauen*, 'to rely,' 'trust'; *treu*, 'faithful,' 'true'; Anglo-Saxon, *treow-treowth* (*fides*); English, 'true,' 'truth.' To these we may add Gothic, *triggons;* Icelandic, *trygge;* (*fidus*, *securus*, *tutus*): all from the same root, and all conveying the same idea of stability or security. 'Truth,' therefore, neither means what is *thought* nor what is *said*, but that which is *permanent*, *stable*, and is and ought to be *relied upon*, because, upon sufficient data, it is capable of being demonstrated or shown to exist. If we admit this explanation, Tooke's assertions . . . become *Vox et preterea nihil.*

Some years ago a bulky volume of seven hundred pages octavo was written by Dr. Johnson, a London physician, to prove that "might makes right,"—that justice is the result, not of divine instinct, but purely and simply of arbitrary decree. The foundation for this equally fallacious and dangerous theory was the fact that "right" is derived from the Latin, *rego*, "to rule"; therefore whatever the *rex*, or "ruler," authorizes or decrees, is *right!* As well might he argue that only courtiers can be polite, because "courtesy" is borrowed from palaces, or that there can be no "heaven" or "hell" in the scriptural sense, because, in its etymological, the one is the canopy *heaved* over our heads, and the other is the *hollow* space beneath our feet. Indeed, we have seen an argument, founded on the etymology of the latter word, to prove that there is "no hell beyond a hole in the ground." In the same way, because our primitive vocabulary is derived solely from sensible

images, it has been assumed that the mind has no ideas except those derived through the senses, and that thought therefore is only sensation. But neither idealism nor materialism can derive any support from the phenomena of language, for the names we give either to outward objects or to our conceptions of immaterial entities can give us no conception of the things themselves. It is true that in every-day language we talk of color, smell, thickness, shape, etc., not only as sensations within us, but as qualities inherent in the things themselves; but it has long since been shown that they are only modifications of our consciousness. It has been justly said that our knowledge of beings is purely indirect, limited, relative; it does not reach to the beings themselves in their absolute reality and essences, but only to their accidents, their modes, their relations, limitations, differences, and qualities; all which are manners of conceiving and knowing which not only do not impart to knowledge the absolute character which some persons attribute to it, but even positively exclude it. "Even substance is but a purely hypothetical postulated residuum after the abstraction of all observable qualities." If, then, our conception of an object in no way resembles the object,—if heat, for example, can be, in no sense, like a live coal, nor pain like the pricking of a pin,—much less can a word by which we denote an object be other than a mere hieroglyphic, or teach us a jot or tittle about the world of sense or thought. Again, the fact that "spirit" once signified "breath," and *animus*, *ἀνεμὸς*, "air," lends no countenance to materialism. "When we impose on a phenomenon of the physical order a moral denomination, we do not thereby spiritualize matter; and because we assign a physical denomination to a moral

phenomenon, we do not materialize spirit." Even if the words by which we designate mental conceptions are derived from material analogies, it does not follow that our conceptions were themselves originally material; and we shall in vain try to account by any external source for the relations of words among themselves. It is told of the metaphysician, Cudworth, that, in reply to a person who ridiculed the doctrine of innate ideas, he told him to take down the first book that came to hand in his library, open at random, and read. The latter opened Cicero's "Offices," and began reading the first sentence, "*Quamquam* ——" "Stop!" cried Cudworth, "it is enough. Tell me how through the *senses* you acquire the idea of *quamquam*."

It is a mistake to suppose that a language is no more than a mere collection of words. The terms we employ are symbols only, which can never fully express our thought, but shadow forth far more than it is in their power distinctly to impart. Lastly, there are in every language, as another has truly said, a vast number of words, such as "sacrifice," "sacrament," "mystery," "eternity," which may be explained by the idea, though the idea cannot be discovered by the word, as is the case with whatever belongs to the mystery of the mind; and this of itself is enough to disprove the conclusion which nominalists would draw from the origin of words, and to prove that, whatever the derivation of "truth," its etymology can establish nothing concerning its essence; and we are still at liberty to regard it as independent, immutable, and eternal, having its archetype in the Divine mind.

Among the terms used in literary criticism, few are more loosely employed than the word "creative" as ap-

plied to men of genius. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, are said to have "creative power"; and, as a figure of speech, the remark is true enough: but, strictly speaking, only Omnipotence can *create;* man can only *combine.* The genius of a great painter may fill his gallery with the most fantastic representations, but every piece of which his paintings are composed exists in nature. Few artists have been more original than Claude Lorraine; yet all his paintings were composed of picturesque materials gathered from different scenes in nature, united with consummate taste and skill, and idealized by his exquisite imagination. To make a modern statue there is a great melting down of old bronze. The essence of originality is not that it creates new material, but that it invents new combinations of material, and imparts new life to whatever it discovers or combines, whether of new or old. Shakespeare's genius is at no other time so incontestably sovereign as when he borrows most,— when he adapts or moulds, in a manner so perfect as to resemble a new creation, the old chronicles and "Italian originals," which have been awaiting the *vivida vis* that makes them live and move. *Non nova, sed nové,* sums up the whole philosophy of the subject. "Originality," says an able writer, "never works more fruitfully than in a soil rich and deep with the foliage of ages."

The word "same" is often used in a way that leads to error. Persons say "the same" when they mean similar. It has been asked whether the ship Argo, in which Jason sought the Golden Fleece, and whose decaying timbers, as she lay on the Greek shore, a grateful and reverent nation had patched up, till, in process of time, not a plank of the original ship was left, was still "the same" ship as of old. The question presents no difficulty, if we remember that

"sameness," that is "identity," is an absolute term, and can be affirmed or denied only in an absolute sense. No man is the same man to-day that he was yesterday, though he may be very similar to his yesterday's self.

A common source of confusion in language is what logicians call "amphibolous" sentences,— that is, sentences that are equivocal, not from a double sense in any word, but because they admit of a double construction. Quintilian mentions several cases where litigation arose from this kind of ambiguity in the wording of a will. In one case a testator expressed a wish that a statue should be erected, and used the following language: *poni statuam auream hastam in manu tenentem.* The question arose whether it was the statue, or the spear only, that was to be of gold. It is well known that punctuation was unknown to the Greeks and Romans; and hence the ancient oracles were able to deliver responses, which, written down by the priests and delivered to the inquirers, were adapted, through the ambiguity thus caused, to save the credit of the oracle, whether the expected event was favorable or unfavorable. An example of this is the famous response, *Aio te Æacida Romanos vincere posse*; which may mean either, "Thou, Pyrrhus, I say, shalt subdue the Romans;" or, "I say, Pyrrhus, that the Romans shall subdue thee." A better illustration is the remarkable response which was given when an oracle was consulted regarding the success of a certain military expedition: *Ibis et redibis nunquam peribis in bello*, which, not being punctuated, might have been translated either: "Thou shalt go, and shalt never return, thou shalt perish in battle;" or, "Thou shalt go and return, thou shalt never perish in battle." We have an example of amphibolous sentences in English in the

witch prophecy, "The Duke yet lives that Henry shall depose," and in the words cited by Whately from the Nicene Creed, "by whom all things were made," which are grammatically referable either to the Father or to the Son.

Among the fallacies in words may be classed those false impressions which some writers contrive to give, while at the same time making no single statement that is untrue or exceptionable. Thus in Gibbon's famous history, it is not by what he expressly says regarding Christianity, that he misleads the reader, but by what he suppresses, hints, and insinuates. As Paley long ago observed, the subtle error rather lies hid in the sinuous folds than is directly apparent on the surface of the polished style. Never openly attacking Christianity, or advancing any opinions which he might find it difficult to defend, he yet contrives to leave an *impression* adverse to the theory of its divine origin. In like manner, it is not usually by false statements that Hume perverts the truth of English history; but his unfairness secretes itself so subtly in the turns of the words, that, when you seek to point it out, it is gone.

Even the Natural Sciences, in which precision of language is vital, are disfigured by words which, if closely scrutinized, are found to be full of error. It is true that as the progress of inquiry brings fresh facts into view, the words which serve to illustrate exploded theories are usually rejected; yet names are sometimes retained after they cease to be correct or expressive. The word "electricity" suggests thunder-storms, shocks at scientific soirées, and Morse's telegraph; yet it means only "the amber-force." The explanation of this name is that the observation of the fact that amber, when rubbed, attracts to itself

light bodies, was the first step taken toward the establishment of this marvellous science. So the name "oxygen," or "the acid-producer," was given to the gas so called, when it was considered to be the cause of acidity. In 1774 the gas called "muriatic acid" was renamed by Scheele, in consequence of certain discoveries made by him, "dephlogisticated muriatic acid." By and by the doctrine of phlogiston was exploded, and Lavoisier, having to modify the name, changed it to "oxymuriatic," or "oxygenized muriatic acid." When, again, it was found that this pungent gas was a *simple* body, and actually entered into the constitution of the muriatic, or, as it is now called, hydrochloric acid,—that the oxygen merely withdrew from the latter the second constituent, viz., hydrogen,—the name had to be altered again, and this time Sir Humphrey Davy suggested "chlorine," or "the green gas," which seems likely to be permanent. Again, until lately, "caloric" was a term in constant use among chemists, and designated something that produced heat. Now this doctrine is abandoned, and heat is said to be the result of molecular and ethereal vibration. All matter is supposed to be immersed in a highly elastic medium, which is called "ether." But what is this "ether," of which heat, light, electricity, and sound, are only so many different modes or manifestations? "'Ether' is a myth,—an abstraction, useful, no doubt, for the purpose of physical speculation, but intended rather to mark the present horizon of our knowledge, than to represent anything which we can grasp either with our senses or our reason." *

The form of cerebral congestion known as "sunstroke," was erroneously so named from the popular belief that it

* Max Müller's "Science of Language," Vol. II, p. 600.

is caused by a sudden concentration of the sun's rays upon a focal point. It is now well known that persons may be attacked by this disease who have not been exposed to the sun's rays,— that it occurs often at night,— and that its cause is not extreme heat only, but the exhaustion consequent upon over-exertion — especially of the brain — anxiety, and worry.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FALLACIES IN WORDS — (*continued*).

I never learned rhetorike certain;
Things that I speke, it mote be bare and plain.— CHAUCER.

Here is our great infelicity, that, when single words signify complex ideas, one word can never distinctly manifest all the parts of a complex idea.— ISAAC WATTS.

If reputation attend these conquests which depend on the fineness and niceties of words, it is no wonder if the wit of men so employed should perplex and subtilize the signification of sounds.— LOCKE.

IT has been remarked by Archbishop Whately that the words whose ambiguity is the most frequently overlooked, and produces the greatest amount of confusion of thought and fallacy, are the commonest,— the very ones whose meaning is supposed to be best understood. "Familiar acquaintance is perpetually mistaken for accurate knowledge." Such a word is "luxury."

A favorite theme for newspaper declamations in these days is the luxury and extravagance of the American people, especially of the *nouveaux riches* whose fortunes have been of mushroom growth. It is easy to declaim thus against luxury,— that is, against the use of things which, at any particular period, are not deemed indispensable to life, health, and comfort; but what do those who indulge in this cheap denunciation mean by the term? Is not luxury a purely *relative* term? Is there a single article of dress, food or furniture which can be pronounced an absolute luxury, without regard to the wealth or poverty of him who enjoys it? Are not the luxuries of one generation

or country the necessaries of another? Persons who are familiar with history know that Alfred the Great had not a chair to sit down upon, nor a chimney to carry off his smoke; that William the Conquerer was unacquainted with the luxury of a feather bed, if it can be called one; that the early aristocracy of England lived on the ground floor, without drainage; that in the Middle Ages shirts were deemed a useless superfluity, and men were even put in the pillory for wearing them; that night-shirts were esteemed a still more needless luxury, and persons of all ranks and classes slept in the first costume of Adam; that travelling carriages are an ingenious invention of modern effeminacy; that the men who first carried umbrellas in the streets, even in the severest rain-storms, were hooted at as dandies and coxcombs; that the nobles and dames of the most brilliant epochs of England's annals ate with their fingers, generally in couples, out of one trencher on a bare table; and that when forks were introduced, they were long hotly opposed as an extravagance, and even denounced by many as a device of Satan, to offer an affront to Providence, who had provided man with fingers to convey his food to his mouth. In the introduction to Hollinshed's "Chronicles," published in 1577, there is a bitter complaint of the multitude of chimneys lately erected, of the exchange of straw pallets for mattresses or flock beds, and of wooden platters for earthenware and pewter. In another place, the writer laments that oak only is used for building, instead of willow as heretofore; adding, that "formerly our houses indeed were of willow, but our men were of oak; but now that our houses are of oak, our men are not only of willow, but some altogether of straw, which is a sore alteration."

Erasmus tells us that salt beef and strong ale constituted the chief part of Queen Elizabeth's breakfast, and that similar refreshments were served to her in bed for supper. There is not a single able-bodied workingman in the United States who does not enjoy fare which would have been deemed luxurious by men of high station in the iron reign of the Tudors; hardly a thriving shopkeeper who does not occupy a house which English nobles in 1650 would have envied; hardly a domestic servant or factory girl who does not on Sundays adorn herself with apparel which would have excited the admiration of the duchesses in Queen Elizabeth's ante-rooms. Xenophon accounts for the degeneracy of the Persians by their luxury, which, he says, was carried to such a pitch that they used gloves to protect their hands. Tea and coffee were once denounced as idle and injurious luxuries; and throughout the larger part of the world tooth-brushes, napkins, suspenders, bathing-tubs, and a hundred other things now deemed indispensable to the health or comfort of civilized man, would be regarded as proofs of effeminacy and extravagance.

Luxury has been a favorite theme of satire and denunciation by poets and moralists from time immemorial. But it may be doubted whether in nations or individuals its effects, even when it rages most fiercely, are half so pernicious as those springing from that indifference to comforts and luxuries which is sometimes dignified with the name of contentment, but which is only another name for sheer laziness. While thousands are ruined by prodigality and extravagance, tens of thousands are kept in poverty by indifference to the comforts and ornaments of life,—by a too feeble development of those desires to

gratify which the mass of men are striving. It is a bad sign when a man is content with the bare necessities of life, and aspires to nothing higher; and equally ominous is it when a nation, however rich or powerful, is satisfied with the capital and glories it has already accumulated. Cry up as we may the virtues of simplicity and frugality, it is yet quite certain that a people content to live upon garlic, macaroni, or rice, are at the very lowest point in the scale both of intellect and morality. A civilized man differs from a savage principally in the multiplicity of his wants. The truth is, man is a constitutionally lazy being, and requires some stimulus to prick him into industry. He must have many difficulties to contend with, many clamorous appetites and tastes to gratify, if you would bring out his energies and virtues; and it is because they are always grumbling,— because, dissatisfied amid the most enviable enjoyments, they clamor and strive for more and more of what Voltaire calls *les superflues choses, si nécessaires*,— that the English people have reached their present pinnacle of prosperity, and accumulated a wealth which almost enables them to defy a hostile world.

Among the familiar words that we employ, few have been more frequently made the instrument of sophistry than "nature" and "art." There are many persons who oppose the teaching of elocution, because they like a "natural" and "artless" eloquence, to which, they think, all elaborate training is opposed, Yet nothing is more certain than that nature and art, between which there is supposed to be an irreconcilable antagonism, are often the very same thing. What is more natural than that a man who lacks vocal power should cultivate and develop his voice by vocal exercises; or that, if he is conscious of

faults in his manner of speaking,—his articulation, gestures, etc.,—he should try, by the help of a good teacher, to overcome them? So with the style of a writer; what is more natural than for one who feels that he has not adequately expressed his thought, to blot the words first suggested and try others, and yet others, till he despairs of further improvement? There are subjects so deep and complex, ideas so novel and abstruse, that the most practised writer cannot do justice to them without great labor. A conscientious author is, therefore, continually transposing clauses, reconstructing sentences, substituting words, polishing and repolishing paragraphs; and this, unquestionably, is "art," or the application of means to an end. But is this art inconsistent with nature?

Similar to the fallacy which lurks in the words "nature" and "natural," as thus employed, is that which lurks in a popular use of the word "simplicity." It has been happily said that while some men talk as if to speak naturally were to speak like a natural, others talk as if to speak with simplicity meant to speak like a simpleton. But what is true "simplicity," as applied to literary composition? Is it old, worn-out commonplace,—"straw that has been thrashed a hundred times without wheat," as Carlyle says,—the shallowest ideas expressed in tame and insipid language? Or is it not rather

> "Nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed,"—

in other words, a just and striking thought expressed in the aptest and most impressive language? Those persons who declaim against the employment of art in speaking and writing, forget that we are all exceedingly artificial, conventional beings. Without training, a speaker is almost

sure to be awkward in gesture and unnatural in utterance. The very preacher who in the street forgets himself and uses the most natural gesticulation and tones, will become self-conscious the moment he ascends the pulpit, and speak in a falsetto key. It is to get rid of these artificial habits that "art" (which is the employment of proper means) is needed.

How many controversies about the "transmutation of Species," and the "fixity of Species," would have been avoided, had the scientists who use these phrases fully pondered their meaning, or rather no-meaning! Some writers have tried to explain the law of constancy in transmission, and its independence of the law of variation, by maintaining that it is the Species only, not the individual, which is reproduced. "Species," says Buffon, "are the only beings in nature." A sheep, it is said, is always and everywhere a sheep, and a man a man, reproducing the *specific type*, but not necessarily reproducing any individual peculiarities. This hypothesis is a striking example of the confusion which results from the introduction of old metaphysical ideas into science. It is evident, as a late writer has clearly shown, that Species cannot reproduce itself, for Species does not exist. It is an entity, an abstract idea, not a concrete fact.

The *thing* Species no more exists than the thing Goodness or the thing Whiteness. "Nature only knows individuals. A collection of individuals so closely resembling each other as all sheep resemble each other, are conveniently classed under one general term, Species; but this general term has no objective existence; the abstract or typical sheep, apart from all concrete individuals, has no existence out of our systems. Whenever an individual

sheep is born, it is the offspring of two individual sheep, whose structures and dispositions it reproduces; it is not the offspring of an abstract idea; it does not come into being at the bidding of a type, which as a Species sits apart, regulating ovine phenomena. . . If, therefore, 'transmutation of Species' is absurd, 'fixity of Species' is not a whit less so. That which does not exist can neither be transmuted nor maintained in fixity. Only individuals exist; they resemble their parents, and they differ from their parents. Out of these resemblances we create Species; out of these differences we create Varieties; we do so as conveniences of classification, and then believe in the reality of our own figments." *

A popular fallacy, which is partly verbal, is the notion, so tenaciously held by many, that exposure to hardship, and even want, in youth, is the cause of the bodily vigor of those men who have lived to a good age in countries with a rocky soil and a bleak climate. What is more natural, it is argued, than that *hardships* should *harden* the constitution? Look at the Indians; how many of them live till eighty or ninety! Yet no person who reasons thus would think, if engaged in cattle-breeding, of neglecting to feed and shelter his animals in their youth; nor if a dozen men, out of a hundred who had faced a battery, should survive and live to a good age, would he think of regarding the facing of batteries as conducive to longevity. The truth is, that early hardships, by destroying all the weak, merely prove the hardiness of the survivors,— which latter is the cause, not the effect, of their having lived through such a training. So "loading a gun-barrel to the muzzle, and firing it off, does not *give* it

* "Westminster Review," September, 1856.

strength; though it proves, if it escape, that it was strong."

The revelations of travellers have dissipated the illusions which once prevailed concerning the hardiness and health of the Indians and other savages. The savage, it is now known, lives in a condition but one degree above starvation. If he sink below it, he disappears instantaneously, as if he had never been. A certain amount of hardship he can endure; but it has limits, which if he passes, he sinks unnoticed and unknown. There is no registrar or newspaper to record that a unit has been subtracted from the amount of human existence. It is true that severe diseases are rarely seen by casual visitors of savage tribes,— and why? Because death is their doctor, and the grave their hospital. When patients are left wholly to nature, nature presses very hard for an immediate payment of her debt.

An ambiguous word, which has been a source of not a little error, is the adjective "light," which is used sometimes in a literal, sometimes in a figurative sense. When writers on Agricultural Chemistry declare that what are called *heavy* soils are always specifically the *lightest*, the statement looks like a paradox. By "heavy" soils are meant, of course, not those which are the weightiest, but those which are ploughed with difficulty,— the effect being like that of dragging a heavy weight. So some articles of food are supposed to be *light of digestion* because they are *specifically light*. Again, there is a popular notion that *strong* drink must make men *strong*; which is a double fallacy, since the word "strong" is applied to alcoholic liquors and to the human body in entirely different senses,

and it is assumed that an effect must be like its cause, which is not true.

Another ambiguous term, at least as popularly used, is "murder." There are persons who assert that the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon, in 1851, was murder in the strictest sense of the term. To send out into the streets of a peaceful town a party of men dressed in uniform, with muskets and bayonets in their hands, and with orders to kill and plunder, is just as essentially murder and robbery, it is said, as to break into a house with half-a-dozen companions out of uniform, and do the same things. Was not Orsini's crime, they ask, as truly a murder as when a burglar kills a man with a revolver in order to rob him? So, again, there are Christian moralists, who, when asked for proof that suicide is sinful, adduce the Scriptural injunction, "Thou shalt do no murder," assuming that suicide, because it is called self-*murder*, is a species of "murder" in the primary sense of the word. It is evident, however, that most, if not all, of these assertions are founded on palpable fallacies. "Murder" is a technical term, and means the wilful, deliberate killing, without just cause, and without certain specified excuses, of a man who belongs to a settled state of society, in which security is afforded to life and property. In all that is said about the atrocity of murder, there is a latent reference to this state of things. Were the "Vigilance Committee" of San Francisco murderers, when they executed criminals illegally? Are the men who "lynch" horse-thieves on our western frontiers, murderers? Were the rebels who, in our late Civil War, shot down Union soldiers, murderers?

The common sentiment of the civilized world recognizes a vast difference between the rights and duties of

sovereigns and subjects, and the relations of nations to each other, on the one hand, and the rights and duties of private individuals on the other; and hence the rules of public and those of private morality must be essentially different. According to legal authority, it is not murder to kill an alien enemy in time of war; nor is it murder to take away a man's life by perjury. Revolutions and *coups d'état* most persons will admit to be sometimes justifiable; and both, when justifiable, justify a certain degree of violence to person, to property, or to previous engagements. The difficulty is to tell just when, and how far, violence may justify and be justified. It has been well said by an acute and original writer that "it is by no means the same thing whether a man is plundered and wounded by burglars, or by the soldiers of an absolute king who is trying to maintain his authority. The sack of Perugia shocked the sensibilities of a great part of Europe; but if the Pope had privately poisoned one of his friends or servants from any purely personal motive, even the blindest religious zeal would have denounced him as a criminal unfit to live. A man must be a very bitter Liberal indeed, who really maintains that the violation by a sovereign of his promissory oath of office stands on precisely the same footing as deliberate perjury in an ordinary court of justice." Suicide, it is evident, lacks the most essential characteristic of murder, namely, its *inhumanity*,—the injury done to one's neighbor and to others by the *insecurity* they are made to feel. Can a man *rob* himself? If not, how can he, in the proper sense of the word, murder himself?

Take another case. When Napoleon Bonaparte was at the climax of his power, and the entire continent lay at

his feet, he aimed a blow at the naval supremacy of England, which, had it taken effect, would have fatally crippled her resources. By a secret article in the Treaty of Tilsit, it was stipulated that he and Alexander, the czar of Russia, should take possession of the fleets of the Neutral Powers. Mr. Canning, the British Prime Minister, saw the peril, and instantly, upon learning of the intrigue, dispatched a naval force under Nelson to Copenhagen, which captured the Danish fleet, the object of the confederates, and conveyed it to Portsmouth. The violation of the law of nations involved in this act was vehemently denounced in the pulpit, in parliament, and on the hustings; and to-day there are many persons who regard the audacious measure as little better than piracy. The world, however, has not sustained the charge. Problems arise in the life of both men and nations, for the solution of which the ordinary rules of ethics are insufficient. It is possible to kill without being guilty of murder, to rob without being a thief, and to break the law of nations without being a buccaneer. The justification of the British Minister lay in the fact that Denmark was powerless to resist the Continental powers, and that her coveted fleet, if not seized by England, would have been used against her.

There is hardly any word which is oftener turned into an instrument of the fallacy of ambiguity than "theory." There is a class of men in every community, of limited education and narrow observation, who, because they have mingled in the world and dealt with affairs, claim to be preëminently *practical* men, and ridicule the opinions of thinkers in their closets as the speculations of "mere *theorists*." Not discriminating carefully between the word

"general" and the word "abstract," and regarding as *abstract* principles what are in nearly all cases *general* principles, they regard all theorizing as synonymous with visionary speculation; while that which they call "practical knowledge," and which they fancy to be wholly devoid of supposition or guesswork, but which is nothing else than a heap of hasty deductions from scanty and inaccurately observed phenomena, they deem more trustworthy than the discoveries of science and the conclusions of reason. Yet, when correctly defined, this very practical knowledge, so boastfully opposed to theory, in reality presupposes it. True practical knowledge is simply a ready discernment of the proper modes and seasons of applying to the common affairs of life those general truths and principles which are deduced from an extensive and accurate observation of facts, by minds stored with various knowledge, accustomed to investigation, and trained to the art of reasoning; or, in other words, by *theorists.* Every man who attempts to trace the causes or effects of an occurrence that falls under his personal observation, theorizes. The only essential distinction, in most cases, between "practical" men and those whom they denounce as visionary, is, not that the latter alone indulge in speculation, but that the theories of the former are based on the facts of their own experience,—those that happen within a narrow sphere, and in a single age; while the conclusions of the latter are deduced from the *facts of all ages and countries*, minutely analyzed and compared.

Thus the "practical" farmer does not hesitate to consult the neighboring farmers, and to make use of the results of their experience concerning the best soils for certain crops, the best manures for those soils, etc.; yet if

another farmer, instead of availing himself of his neighbors' experiences only, consults a book or books containing the digested and classified results of a thousand farmers' experiences touching the same points, he is called, by a strange inconsistency, "a book-farmer," "a mere theorist." The truth is, the "practical" man, so called, extends his views no farther than the fact before him. Even when he is so fortunate as to learn its cause, the discovery is comparatively useless, since it affords no light in new and more complex cases. The scientific man, unsatisfied with the observation of one fact, collects many, and by tracing the points of resemblance, deduces a comprehensive truth of universal application. "Practical" men conduct the details of ordinary business with a masterly hand. As Burke said of George Grenville, they do admirably well so long as things move on in the accustomed channel, and a new and troubled scene is not opened; but they are not fitted to contend successfully with the difficulties of an untried and hazardous situation. When "the high roads are broken up, and the waters are out," when a new state of things is presented, and "the line affords no precedent," then it is that they show a mind trained in a subordinate sphere, formed for servile imitation, and destined to borrow its lights of another. "Expert men," says Bacon, "can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best from those that are learned."

Among the current phrases of the day, by which men are led into error, one of the commonest is the expression "doing good." Properly understood, "to do good" is to do right; but the phrase has acquired a technical sense which is much narrower. It means, not discharging faithfully

the duties of one's calling, but stepping aside from its routine to relieve the poor, the distressed, and the ignorant; or to reform the sinful. The lawyer who, for a fee, conscientiously gives advice, or pleads in the courts, is not thought to be doing good; but he is so regarded if he gratuitously defends a poor man or a widow. A merchant who sells good articles at fair prices, and pays his notes punctually, is not doing good; but he is doing good, if he carries broth and blankets to beggars, teaches in a Sunday School, supports a Young Men's Christian Association, or distributes tracts to the irreligious. Charitable and philanthropic societies of every kind are all recognized as organs for doing good; but the common pursuits of life,— law, medicine, agriculture, manufacturing, trading, etc.,— are not.

The incorrectness of this view will be seen if we for a moment reflect what would become of society, including its charitable institutions and philanthropists, should its different members refuse to perform their respective functions. Society is a body corporate, which can exist,— at least, in a healthy state,— only on condition that each man performs the specific work which Providence, or his own sense of his fitness for it, has assigned to him. Thus one man tills the ground; another engages in manufacturing; a third gathers and distributes the produce of labor in its various forms; a fourth loans or exchanges money; a fifth makes or executes laws; and each of these persons, as he is contributing to the general good, is doing good as truly as the most devoted clergyman who labors in the cure of souls, or philanthropist who carries loaves of bread to hovels. To deny this, it has been well said, is to say that a commissariat or transport corps has nothing to do with carrying

on a war, and that this business is discharged entirely by the men who stand in line of battle or mount the breach.

The popular theory proceeds upon two assumptions, both of which are false; first, that the motives which urge men to diligence in their callings are mean and paltry,—that selfishness is the mainspring which causes all the wheels in the great machine of society to revolve; and, secondly, that pursuits which benefit those who prosecute them are necessarily selfish. The truth is, the best work, and a very large part of the work, done in every calling, is done not from a mean and sordid hunger for its emoluments, whether of money, rank, or fame, but from a sincere love for it, and pride in performing its duties well and creditably. The moment a man begins to lose this *esprit de corps*, this high-minded professional pride, and to find his reward in his pay and not in his work, that moment his work begins to deteriorate, and he ceases to meet with the highest success. If pursuits which benefit those who follow them are necessarily selfish, then philanthropy itself is selfish, for its rewards, in popular estimation, are of the noblest kind. No sane man will depreciate the blessings that result from the labors of the Howards, the Frys, and the Nightingales; but they bear the same relation to the ordinary pursuits of life that medicine bears to food. Doctors and surgeons are useful members of society; but their services are less needed than those of butchers and bakers. Let the farmer cease to sow and reap, let the loom and the anvil be forsaken, and the courts of justice be closed, and not only will the philanthropist starve, but society will speedily become a den of robbers, if it does not utterly cease to exist.

Mr. Mill notices an ambiguity in the word "right," which has been made the occasion of an ingenious sophism. A man asserts that he has a right to publish his opinions, which may be true in one sense, namely, that it would be wrong in any *other* person to hinder or prevent their publication; but it does not follow that, in publishing his opinions, he is *doing right*, for this is an entirely distinct proposition from the other. Its truth depends upon two things; first, whether he has taken due pains to ascertain that the opinions are true, and second, whether their publication in this manner, and at this time, will probably be beneficial to the interests of truth on the whole. Another sophism, based on the ambiguity of the same word, is that of confounding a right of any kind with a right to enforce that right by resisting or punishing any violation of it, as in the case of a people whose right to good government is ignored by tyrannical rulers. The right or liberty of the people to turn out their rulers is so far from being the same thing as the other, that "it depends upon an immense number of varying circumstances, and is altogether one of the knottiest questions in practical ethics."

Montaigne complains with good reason that too many definitions, explanations, and replies to difficult questions, are purely verbal. "I demand what 'nature' is, what 'pleasure,' 'circle,' and 'substitution' are? The question is about words, and is answer'd accordingly. A stone is a body; but if a man should further urge, and 'what is body?' 'Substance;' 'and what is substance?' and so on, he would drive the respondent to the end of his calepin. We exchange one word for another, and ofttimes for one less understood. I better know what man is, than I know

what animal is, or mortal, or rational. To satisfie one doubt, they pop me in the mouth with three; 'tis the Hydra's head."* There was a time when it was said that the essence of gold and its substantial form consisted in its *aureity*, and this explanation was supposed to answer all questions, and solve all doubts.

From all this it will be seen that our words are, to a large extent, carelessly employed,—the signs of crude and indefinite generalizations. But even when the greatest care is taken in the employment of words, it is nearly impossible to choose and put them together so exquisitely that a sophist may not wrest and pervert their meaning. Those persons who have ever had a lawsuit need not be told how much ingenious argument may hang on a shade of meaning, to be determined objectively without reference to the fancied intentions of the legislator or the writer. Hardly a week passes, but a valuable bequest is successfully contested through some loophole of ambiguous phraseology. If, in ordinary life, words represent impressions and ideas, in legal instruments they are *things;* they dispose of property, liberty, and life; they express the will of the lawgiver, and become the masters of our social being. Yet so carelessly are they used by lawyers and legislators, that half the money spent in litigation goes to determine the meanings of words and phrases. O'Connell used to assert that he could drive a coach-and-six through an Act of Parliament. Many of our American enactments yawn with chasms wide enough for a whole railway train. But even when laws have been framed with the most consummate skill, the subtlety of a Choate or a Follett may twist what appears to be the clearest and most unmistakable

*"Essays," Cotton's edition.

language into a meaning the very opposite to that which the common sense of mankind would give it.

I have heard Judge Story make the following statement to show the extreme difficulty of framing a statute so as to avoid all ambiguity in its language. Being once employed by Congress to draft an important law, he spent six months in trying to perfect its phraseology, so that its sense would be clear beyond a shadow of a doubt, leaving not the smallest loophole for a lawyer to creep through. Yet, in less than a year, after having heard the arguments of two able attorneys, in a suit which came before him as a Judge of the United States Supreme Court, he was utterly at a loss to decide upon the statute's meaning!

A signal illustration of the ambiguity that lurks in the most familiar words, is furnished by a legal question that was fruitful of controversy and "costs" not long ago in England. An English nobleman, Lord Henry Seymour, who lived in Paris many years, executed a will in 1856, wherein he made a bequest of property worth seventy thousand pounds to the hospitals of London and Paris. No sooner was it known that he was dead, than the question was raised, "What does 'London' mean? Where are its limits, and what is its area? What does it contain, and what does it exclude?" Four groups of claimants appeared, each to some extent opposed by the other three. Group the first said, "The gift is obviously confined to the *City* proper of London,"— that is, "London within the walls," comprising little more than half of a square mile. "Not so," protested group the second; "it extends to all the hospitals within the old bills of mortality,"— that is, London, Westminster, Southwark, and about thirty outparishes, but excluding Marylebone, St. Pancras, Padding-

ton, Chelsea, and everything beyond. Group the third insisted that "London" included "all the area within the metropolitan boroughs"; while group the fourth, for cogent reasons of their own, were positive that the testator meant, and the true construction was, nothing less than the whole area included within the Registrar-General's and the Census Commissioner's interpretation of the word "Metropolis." The Master of the Rolls decided that the testator meant to use the word "London" in its full, complete, popular sense, as including all the busily occupied districts of what is usually called the Metropolis, as it existed in the year when the will was made. No sooner, however, was this vexed question settled, than another, hardly less puzzling, arose,— namely, What is a "Hospital"? Nearly every kind of charitable institution put in its claim; but it was finally decided that only such charities should share in the bequest as fell within the definition of the French word *hospice* used in the will.

Another perplexing question which came before the English courts some years ago, and which not less vividly shows the importance of attention to the words we use, related to the meaning of the word "team," as used by writers generally, and used in a written agreement. A certain noble duke made an agreement with one of his tenants in Oxfordshire concerning the occupancy of a farm, and a portion of the agreement was couched in the following terms: "The tenant to perform each year for the Duke of ——, at the rate of one day's team-work, with two horses and one proper person, for every fifty pounds of rent, when required (except at hay or corn harvest), without being paid for the same." In other words, the rent of the farm was made up of two portions, the

larger being a money payment, and the former a certain amount of farm service. All went on quietly and smoothly in reference to this agreement, until one particular day, when the duke's agent or bailiff desired the farmer to send a cart to fetch coals from a railway station to the ducal mansion. "Certainly not," said the farmer. "I'll send the horses and a man, but you must find the cart." "Pooh, pooh! what do you mean? Does not your agreement bind you to do team-work occasionally for his Grace?" "Yes, and here's the team; two horses and a careful man to drive them." "But there can't be a team without a cart or wagon." "O yes, there can, the horses are the team." "No, the horses and cart together are the team."

The question which the court was called on to decide in the lawsuit which followed, was,—What is a "team"? The case was at first tried at Oxford, before a common jury, who gave a verdict substantially for the duke. A rule was afterward obtained, with a view to bring the question of definition before the judges at the Court of Queen's Bench. The counsel for the duke contended that as team-work cannot be done by horses without a cart or wagon, it is obvious that a team must include a vehicle as well as the horses by which it was to be drawn. Mr. Justice A. said that, in the course of his reading, he had met with some lines which tend to show that the team is separate from the cart,—

> "Giles Jelt was sleeping, in his cart he lay;
> Some waggish pilf'rers stole his team away.
> Giles wakes and cries, 'Ods Bodikins, what's here?
> Why, how now; am I Giles or not?
> If he, I've lost six geldings to my smart;
> If not, Ods Bodikins, I've found a cart.'"

Mr. Justice B. quoted a line from Wordsworth,—

> "My jolly team will work alone for me,"

as proving the farmer's interpretation, seeing that, though horses might possibly be jolly, a cart cannot. The counsel for His Grace urged that the dictionaries of Johnson and Walker both speak of a team as "a number of horses drawing the same carriage." "True," said Justice A. "do not these citations prove that the team and the carriage are distinct things?" "No," replied the counsel on the duke's side; "because a team without a cart would be of no use." He cited the description given by Cæsar of the mode of fighting in chariots adopted by the ancient Britons, and of the particular use and meaning of the word *temanem*. From Cæsar he came down to Gray, the English poet, and cited the lines,—

> "Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
> Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe hath broke;
> How jocund did they drive their team afield,
> How bowed the wood beneath their sturdy stroke;"

and from Gray he came down to the far-famed "Bull Run" affair in the recent American civil war, a graphic account of which told that "the teamsters cut the traces of the horses."

The counsel for the farmer, on the other hand, referred to Richardson's English dictionary, and to Bosworth's Anglo-Saxon dictionary, for support to the assertion that a team implies only the horses, not the vehicle also; and he then gave the following citations to the same effect: From Spenser,—

> "Thee a ploughman all unmeeting found,
> As he his toilsome team that way did guide,
> And brought thee up a ploughman's state to bide."

From Shakespeare,—

> "We fairies that do run,
> By the triple Hecat's team,
> From the presence of the sun,
> Following darkness like a dream."

Again from Shakespeare,—

"I am in love, but a team of horse shall
Not pluck that from me, nor who 'tis I love."

From Dryden,—

"He heaved with more than human force to move
A weighty straw, the labor of a team."

Again from Dryden,—

"Any number, passing in a line;
Like a long team of snowy swans on high,
Which clap their wings and cleave the liquid sky."

Spenser, Roscommon, Martineau, and other authorities, were also cited to the same purport, and all the light which English literature could throw upon the point was converged upon it. The learned judges were divided in their opinions, one deciding that the word "team" clearly implied the cart as well as the horses, two other judges deciding that it was enough if the farmer sent the horse and the driver to be put to such service as the duke's agent might please. The arguments by which each supported his conclusion were so acute, cogent, and weighty, that their disagreement seems to have been inevitable.

The English historian, Hallam, says of the language of Hobbes that it is so lucid and concise that it would be almost as improper to put an algebraical process in different terms as some of his metaphysical paragraphs. Having illustrated his precept by his practice, Hobbes speaks with peculiar authority on the importance of discrimination in the use of words. In a memorable passage of the "Leviathan," from which we have already quoted, he says: "Seeing that truth consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations, a man that seeketh precise truth had need to remember what every name he useth stands for, and to place it accordingly; or else he will find

himself entangled in words as a bird in limetwigs,—the more he struggles, the more belimed. Words are wise men's counters,—they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, a Thomas, or any other doctor whatsoever." Fuller quaintly suggests that the reason why the Schoolmen wrote in so bald a style was, "that the vermin of equivocation might not hide themselves in the nap of their words." The definition of words has been often regarded as a mere pedagogue's exercise; but when we call to mind the persecutions, proscriptions, tortures, and even massacres, which have resulted from mistakes about the meaning of certain words, the office of the lexicographer assumes a grave and dignified aspect. It is not enough, however, in guarding against error, to discriminate our words, so as to understand their exact force. We must also keep constantly in mind the fact that language, when used with the utmost precision, is at best but an imperfect representation of thought. Words are properly neither the "names of things," as modern writers have defined them, nor, as the ancients viewed them, the "pictures of ideas." The most they can do is to express the *relations* of things; they are, as Hobbes said, "the signs of our conceptions," serving as a mark to recall to ourselves the likeness of a former thought, and as a sign to make it known to others.

Even as the signs of our conceptions, they are at best imperfect and unsatisfactory, representing only approximately what we think, and never coördinating with the conceptions they are used to represent. "Seizing on some characteristic mark of the conception, they always express too little or too much. They are sometimes distinctly

metaphorical, sometimes indefinitely assertive; sometimes too concrete, sometimes too abstract." Our sentences are not images of thought, reflected in a perfect mirror, nor photographs which lack coloring only; they are but the merest skeleton of expression, hints of meaning, tentative signs, which can put another only into a partial possession of our consciousness. To apprehend perfectly the thought of another man, even one who uses language with the utmost nicety and accuracy, we need to know his individuality, his entire past history; we must interpret and supplement his meaning by all that we know of his intellectual and moral constitution, his ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking; we must be *en rapport* with him; and even then we may fail to penetrate to the central meaning of his words, the very core of his thought.

The soul of every man is a mystery which no other man can fathom; we are, as one has said, spirits in prison, able only to make signals to each other, but with a world of things to think and say which our signals cannot describe at all. There is hardly an abstract term in any language which conveys precisely the same meaning to two different minds; every word is sure to awaken in one mind more or less different associations from those it awakens in another. Words mean the same thing only to persons who are psychologically the same, and who have had the same experiences. It is obvious that no word can explain any sensation, pleasant or painful, to one who has never felt the sensation. When Saunderson, who was born blind, tried to define "red," he compared that color to the blowing of a trumpet, or the crowing of a cock. In like manner Massieu, the deaf-mute, in trying to describe the sound of a trumpet, said that it was "red." The state-

ment that words have to two persons a common meaning only when they suggest ideas of a common experience, is true even of the terms we stop to ponder; how much more true, then, of words whose full and exact meaning we no more pause to consider, than we reflect that the gold eagle which passes through our hands is a thousand cents. Try to ascertain the meaning of the most familiar words which are dropping from men's lips, and you find that each has its history, and that many are an epitome of the thoughts and observations of ages.

What two persons, for example, attach the same meaning to the words "democracy," "conservatism," "radicalism," "education"? What is the meaning of "gentleman," "comfortable," "competence"? De Quincey says that he knew several persons in England with annual incomes bordering on twenty thousand pounds, who spoke of themselves, and seemed seriously to think themselves, "unhappy paupers." Lady Hester Stanhope, with an income of two thousand seven hundred pounds a year, thought herself an absolute pauper in London, and went to live in the mountains of Syria; "for how, you know," she would say pathetically, "could the humblest of spinsters live decently on that pittance?" Do the chaste and the licentious, the amiable and the revengeful, mean the same thing when they speak of "love" or "hate"? With what precious meaning are the words "home" and "heaven" flooded to some persons, and with what icy indifference are they heard by others!

So imperfect is language that it is doubtful whether such a thing as a self-evident verbal proposition, the absolute truth of which can never be contested, is possible; for it can never be absolutely certain what is the meaning of

the words in which the proposition is expressed, and the assertion that it is founded on partial observation, or that the words imperfectly express the observation on which it is founded, or are incomplete metaphors, or are defective in some other respect, must always be open to proof.

Even words that designate outward, material objects, cognizable by the senses, do not always call up similar thoughts in different minds. The meaning they convey depends often upon the mental qualities of the hearer. Thus the word "sun" uttered to an unlettered man of feeble mental powers, conveys simply the idea of a ball of light and heat, which rises in the sky in the morning, and goes down at evening; but to the man of vivid imagination, who is familiar with modern scientific discoveries, it suggests, more or less distinctly, all that science has revealed concerning that luminary. If we estimate words according to their etymological meaning, we shall still more clearly see how inadequate they are in themselves to involve the mass of facts which they connote,—as inadequate as is a thin and worthless bit of paper, which yet may represent a thousand pounds. In no case is the whole of an object expressed or characterized by its appellation, but only some salient feature or phenomenon is suggested, which is sometimes real, at others only apparent. Take the name of an animal, and it may probably express some trivial fact about its nose or its tail, as in "rhinoceros" we express nothing but the horn in its nose, and in "squirrel" we note only its shady tail; but each of these animals has other important characteristics, and other animals may have the very characteristics which these names import. The Latin word *Homo* means, etymologically, a creature made of earth, which is but

metaphorically true; but for what an infinity, almost, of complex conceptions and relations does it stand! The Sanskrit has four names for "elephant," from different petty characteristics of the animal, and yet how few of its qualities do they describe! "Take a word expressive of the smallest possible modification of matter,—a word invented in the most expressive language in the world, and invented by no less eminent a philosopher than Democritus, and that, too, with great applause,—the word 'atom,' meaning that which cannot be cut. Yet simple as is the notion to be expressed, and great as were the resources at command, what a failure the mere *word* is! It expresses too much and too little, too much as being applicable to other things, and consequently ambiguous; too little, because it does not express all the properties even of an atom. Its inadequacy cannot be more forcibly illustrated than by the fact that its precise Latin equivalent is by us confined to the single acceptation 'insect'!"*

But if words are but imperfect symbols for designating material objects, how much more unequal must they be to the task of expressing that which lies above and behind matter and sensation, especially as all abstract terms are metaphors taken from sensible objects! How many feelings do we have, in the course of our lives, which beggar description! How many apprehensions, limitations, distinctions, opinions are clearly present, at times, to our consciousness, which elude every attempt to give them verbal expression! Even the profoundest thinkers and the most accurate, hair-splitting writers, who weigh and test to the bottom every term they use, are baffled in the effort so to convey their conclusions as to defy all misapprehension or successful

* "Chapters on Language," by F. W. Farrar.

refutation. Beginning with definitions, they find that the definitions themselves need defining; and just at the triumphant moment when the structure of argument seems complete and logic-proof, some lynx-eyed adversary detects an inaccuracy or a contradiction in the use of some keystone term, and the whole magnificent pile, so painfully reared, tumbles into ruins.

The history of controversy, in short, in all ages and nations, is a history of disputes about words. The hardest problems, the keenest negotiations, the most momentous decisions, have turned on the meaning of a phrase, a term, or even a particle. A misapplied or sophistical expression has provoked the fiercest and most interminable quarrels. Misnomers have turned the tide of public opinion; verbal fallacies have filled men's souls with prejudice, rage, and hate; and "the sparks of artful watchwords, thrown among combustible materials, have kindled the flames of deadly war and changed the destiny of empires."

CHAPTER XIII.

NAMES OF MEN.

"Imago animi, vultus, vitae, nomen est."

L'étude des noms propres n'est point sans intérêt pour la morale, l'organization politique, la legislation, et l'histoire même de la civilization.—SALVERTE.

AMONG the crotchets of Sterne's dialectician, Walter Shandy, was a theory regarding the importance of Christian names in determining the future behavior and destiny of the children to whom they are given. He solemnly maintained the opinion that there is a strange kind of magic bias which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impress upon men's character or conduct. "How many Cæsars and Pompeys," he would say, "by mere inspiration of their names, have been rendered worthy of them? And how many there are," he would add, "who might have done exceedingly well in the world, had not their characters and spirits been utterly depressed and Nicodemused into nothing!" Of all the names in the universe the one to which the philosopher had the most unconquerable aversion was "Tristram." He would break off in the midst of one of his disputes on the subject of names, and demand of his antagonist whether he would say he had ever remembered, or whether he had ever heard tell of a man called "Tristram" performing anything great or worth recording. "No," he would say; "*Tristram!* the thing is impossible."

In these observations of Mr. Shandy there may be some

exaggeration, but they contain substantial truth. The power of names in elevating or degrading both the things and persons to whom they are applied, is known to all thoughtful observers. Give to a conscious being a significant and graphic appellation, and it tends to make the character gravitate in the direction of the name. There are names that seem to act like promissory notes, which the bearer does all in his power to redeem at maturity; names that tend to verify themselves by swaying men *toward* the qualities they denote, while they too often lead to the exclusion of others no less important. It is difficult to say which is the greater misfortune, for a man to have a positively mean name, or one that is grandiose. Lord Lytton, in "Kenelm Chillingly," speaking of the moral responsibilities of parents for the names they give their children, regards as equally to be deprecated the names which stamp a child with mediocrity, and those which stamp him with an impress of absurd and overweening ambition. Inflict upon a man, he says, the burden of a great name which he must utterly despair of equalling, and you crush him beneath the weight. If a poet were called John Milton, or William Shakespeare, he would not dare publish even a sonnet. On the other hand, call a child Peter Snooks or Lazarus Rust, and though he have the face and form of the god of the silver bow, and the eloquence of a Chatham, he will find it hard, if not impossible, to achieve distinction,— the name will be such a dead weight on his intellectual energies. Can Tabitha be a name to conjure with; can Jerusha be musical on the lips of love, or Higginbotham fill the trump of fame? Think of Washington having the name of Jenkins, and toasts being drunk to the immortal Jenkins, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his country-

men!" The true choice of a name lies between extremes,—the two extremes of ludicrous insignificance and oppressive renown. It is questionable whether a good deal of the mediocrity of the reigning families in Europe is not due to the labyrinth of names in which the heir to a throne is hidden at birth, like a moth in a silk cocoon. Some years ago an infant prince of Saxony was enveloped in sixteen names. About forty years ago the Queen of Naples gave birth to a princess whose names numbered thirty-two, or a dozen more than the names of Susan Brown, of whom we are told that

> "The patronymical name of the maid
> Was so completely overlaid
> With a long prenomical cover,
> That if each additional proper noun
> Was laid by the priest intensively down,
> Miss Susan was done uncommonly Brown,
> The moment the christening was over!"

Think of an infant's being smothered for years in such a superfetation of names as that of the Neapolitan princess. It must require more mental energy than many babies can command, to break one's way out of such a verbal palace prison as that.

"*Notre nom propre*," says a French writer, "*c'est nous mêmes.*" The name of a man instantly recalls him to recollection, with his physical and moral qualities, and the remarkable events, if any, in his career. The few syllables forming it "suffice to reopen the fountain of a bereaved mother's tears; to cover with blushes the face of the maiden who believes her secret about to be revealed; to agitate the heart of the lover; to light up in the eyes of an enemy the fire of rage, and to awaken in the breast of one separated by distance from his friend the liveliest emotions of hope or regret." What would history or biog-

raphy be without proper names; or what stimulus would men have, inciting them to the performance of great and noble deeds, if they could not live a second life in their names? Among most nations the imposition of names has been esteemed of such moment, that it has been attended with religious rites. The Jews accompanied it with circumcision; the Greeks and Romans with religious ceremonies and sacrifices; the Persians, after a religious service, chose at a venture from names written on slips of paper, and laid upon the Koran; while many Christians sanctify the rite by baptism.

It is a well established fact that all proper names were originally significant, though in the lapse of years the meaning of many of them has been obscured or obliterated. Thus, the oldest known name, Adam, meant "red," indicating that his body was fashioned from the red earth; while Moses signified "drawn from the water." So the fore-names of the Saxons were significant,—as Alfred, "all peace"; Biddulph, "the slayer of wolves"; Edmund, "truth-mouth," or "the speaker of truth"; Edward, "truth-keeper"; Goddard, "honored of God." It is said that Mr. Freeman, the English historian, has grown, in the course of his studies, so in love with the Old-English period, that he has named three of his children Ælfred, Eadward, and Æthelburgh. According to Verstegan, William was a name not given to children, but a title of honor given for noble or worthy deeds. When a German had killed a Roman, the golden helmet of the vanquished soldier was placed upon his head, and the victor was honored with the title Gildhelm, or "golden helmet,"—in French, *Guillaume.*

In the early ages of the world a single name sufficed

for each person. It was generally descriptive of some quality he had, or which his parents hoped he might in future have. In the course of time, to distinguish a man from others bearing the same appellative, a second name became necessary. The earliest approach to the modern system of nomenclature, was the addition of the name of a man's son to his own name; as Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, or Joshua, the son of Nun,— a practice which survives in our own day in such names as Adamson and Fitzherbert. The Romans, to mark the different *gentes* and *familiæ*, and to distinguish individuals of the same race, had three names,—the *Prænomen*, the *Nomen*, and the *Cognomen*. The first denoted the individual; the second was the generic name, or term of clanship; and the third indicated the family. Military commanders, and other persons of the highest eminence, sometimes were honored with a fourth name, or *Agnomen;* as Coriolanus, Africanus, Germanicus, borrowed from the name of a hostile country, which had been the scene of their exploits. A person was usually addressed only by his prænomen, which, Horace tells us, "delicate ears loved":

"Gaudent prænomine molles
Auriculæ."

Archdeacon Hare has well observed that by means of their names political principles, political duties, political affections were impressed on the minds of the Romans from their birth. Every member of a great house had a determinate course marked out for him, the path in which his forefathers had trod; his name admonished him of what he owed to his country. "*Rien*," says Desbrosses, "*n'a contribué davantage à la grandeur de la république que cette methode de succession nominale, qui, incorporant, pour ainsi*

dire, à la gloire de l'état, la gloire des noms héréditaires, joignit le patriotisme de race au patriotisme national."

After the conversion of Europe to Christianity, the old Pagan names were commonly discarded, and Scriptural names, or names derived from church history, took their place. About the close of the tenth century, distinctive appellations, describing physical and moral qualities, habits, professions, etc., were added for the purpose of identification; but as these sobriquets were imposed upon many who bore the same baptismal names, an entire change in the system of names became necessary, and hereditary surnames were adopted. These, it is said, were at first written, "not in a direct line after the Christian name, but above it, between the lines," and thus were literally *supra nomina*, or "surnames."

Our English names, most of which have originated since the Norman Conquest, are borrowed, to some extent, from nearly all the races and languages of the earth. The Hebrew is represented in Ben, which means "son," and the Syriac in Bar, as in Barron and Bartholomew. The desire to disguise Old Testament names has shortened Abraham into "Braham," and Moses into "Mosely" or "Moss." In like manner Solomon becomes "Sloman"; Levi, "Lewis"; and Elias, "Ellis."

The three most common patronymics of Celtic origin, now used by the English, are *O*, *Mac*, and *Ap*. The Highlanders of Scotland employed the *sire*-name with Mac, and hence the Macdonalds and Mac Gregors, meaning "the son of Donald" and "the son of Gregor." The Irish used the prefix of *Oy* or *O*, signifying grandson; as, O'Hara, O'Neale. They use the word Mac also; and the two names together are so essential notes of the Irish, that

"Per Mac atque O, tu veros cognoscis Hibernos,
His duobus ademptis, nullus Hibernus adest."

Mr. Lower, in his interesting work on personal names,* states that among the archives of the corporation of Galway, there is an order dated 1518, declaring that "neither O ne Mac shoulde strutte ne swagger through the streetes of Galway."

The old Normans prefixed to their names the word *Fitz* a corruption of *fils*, derived from the Latin *filius*; as Fitz-William, "the son of William." Camden states that there is not a village in Normandy that has not surnamed some family in England. The French names thus introduced from Normandy may generally be known by the prefixes *De*, *Du*, *De la*, *St.*, and by the suffixes *Font*, *Beau*, *Age*, *Mont*, *Bois*, *Champ*, *Ville*, etc., most of which are parts of the proper names of places; as De Mortimer, St. Maure (Seymour), Montfort, etc. The Russian peasantry employ the termination *witz*, and the Poles *sky* in the same sense; as Peter Paulowitz, "Peter, the son of Paul," and James Petrowsky, "James, the son of Peter."

In Wales, till a late period, no surnames were used, except *Ap*, or *Son*; as Ap Richard, now corrupted into Prichard; Ap Owen, now Bowen; Ap Roderick, now Broderick and Brodie. Not over a century has passed since one might have heard in Wales of such "yard-long-tailed" combinations as Evan-ap-Griffith-ap-David-ap Jenken, and so on to the seventh or eighth generation, the individual carrying his pedigree in his name.* To ridicule this absurd species of nomenclature, a wag of the seventeenth century described cheese as being

*"An Essay on English Surnames," by Mark Antony Lower, M.A., F.S.A., a work full of interesting information on the subject of which it treats, and to which I am much indebted.

"Adam's own cousin-german by its birth,
Ap-Curds-ap-Milk-ap-Cow-ap-Grass-ap-Earth!"

Mr. Lower says that the following anecdote was related to him by a native of Wales: An Englishman riding one dark night among the mountains, heard a cry of distress, uttered apparently by a man who had fallen into a ravine near the highway, and, on listening more attentively, heard the words: "Help, master, help!" in a voice truly Cambrian. "Help! what, who are you?" inquired the traveller. "Jenkin-ap-Griffith-ap-Robin-ap-William-ap-Rees-ap-Evan," was the reply. "Lazy fellows that ye be," rejoined the Englishman, putting spurs to his horse, "to lie rolling in that hole, *half a dozen of ye;* why, in the name of common sense, don't ye *help one another out?*"

In the twelfth century it was considered a mark of disgrace to have no surname. A wealthy heiress is represented as saying in respect to her suitor, Robert, natural son of King Henry I, who had but one name:

"It were to me a great shame,
To have a lord withouten his twa name;"

whereupon the King, to remedy the fatal defect, gave him the surname of Fitz-Roy.

The early Saxons had as a rule but one name, which was always significant of some outward or other peculiarity, and was doubtless often given to children with the belief or hope that the meaning of the word might exert some mysterious influence on the bearer's future destiny. Ere long, however, surnames came into fashion with them, too, and were derived from the endless variety of personal qualities, natural objects, occupations and pursuits, social relations, localities, offices, and even from different parts of the body (as Cheek, Beard, Shanks), from sports (as Ball,

Bowles, Whist, Fairplay), from measures (as Gill, Peck), and from diseases (as Cramp, Toothacher, Akenside), from a conjunction (as And), and from coins (as Penny, Twopenny, Moneypenny, Grote, Pound). On a person with the first of these pecuniary names, the following epitaph was written:

> "Reader, if cash thou art in want of any,
> Dig four feet deep, and thou shalt find a Penny."

The prefix *atte* or *at* softened to *a* or *an* has helped to form many names. A man living on a moor would call himself Attemoor or Atmoor; if near a gate, Attegate or Agate. John Atten Oak was oftentimes condensed into John-a-Noke, and then into John Noaks. Nye is thus a corruption of Atten-Eye, "at the island." From Applegarth, "an orchard," are derived Applegate and Appleton. Beckett means literally "a little brook"; Chase, "a forest"; Cobb, "a harbor"; Craig, "a rock" or "precipice"; Holme and Holmes, "a meadow surrounded with water"; Holt, "a grove"; Holloway, "a deep road between high banks"; Lee and Leigh, "a pasture"; Peel, "a pool"; Slack, "low ground," or "a pass between mountains." The root of the ubiquitous Smith is *smitan*, "to smite," and like the Latin *faber*, the name was originally given to all "smiters," whether workers in wood or workers in metal. Soldiers were sometimes called War-Smiths. Among all the forty thousand English surnames, no one has been more prolific of jests and witticisms, especially John Smith, which, from its commonness, is practically no name, though the rural Englishman seems to have thought otherwise, who directed a letter, "For Mr. John Smith, London,— with spead." As there are hundreds of John Smiths in the London Directory, the letter might as well have been addressed to the Man in the Moon. There is a well known story of a

wag at a crowded theatre, who secured a seat by shouting "Mr. Smith's house is on fire!"

Many words obsolete in English are preserved in surnames; as Sutor, which is the Latin and Saxon for "shoemaker;" Latimer, from Latiner, "a writer of Latin;" Chaucer, from *chausier*, "a hose-maker"; Lorimer, "a maker of spurs, and bits for bridles." An Arkwright was "a maker of meal-chests"; Lander is from *lavandier*, "a washerwoman"; Banister, is "a keeper of the Bath"; Crocker, "a potter"; Shearman, "one who shears worsteds, etc."; Sanger, "a singer"; Notman, "a cowherd." Generally all names ending in *er* indicate some employment or profession. Such names as Baxter and Brewster are the feminine of Baker and Brewer, as is Webster of Webber, or "weaver," which shows that these trades were anciently carried on by women, and that when men began to follow them, they retained for some time the feminine names, as do men-milliners now. The name of the poet Whittier, however, is a corruption of "White church." The termination *ward* indicates "a keeper"; as Hayward, "keeper of the town cattle"; Woodward, "forest-keeper." Rush is "subtle"; Bonner, "kind"; Eldridge, "wild," "ghastly." Numerous surnames are derived from the chase, showing the passion of the early English for field-sports; as Bowyer, Fowler, Fletcher (from the French *flèche*, an arrow), Hartman. Tod is the Scotch word for fox; hence Todhunter (the name of a celebrated mathematician who died recently at Cambridge, Eng.) is "a fox-hunter." Among the names derived from offices are Chalmers, "a chamberlain;" Foster, "a nourisher," one who had care of the children of great men; and Franklin, a person next in dignity to an esquire. Palmer comes from the professional wanderer of

the ancient time, who always carried a *palm*-branch as a pledge of his having visited the Holy Land. Landseer was a "land-steward," or bailiff.

Some names, denoting mean occupations which only bondmen would follow, have been disguised by a new orthography, "mollified ridiculously," as Camden says, "lest their bearers should seem vilified by them." Carter, Tailor, and Smith have been metamorphosed into Carteer, Tayleure, Smyth, Smeeth, or Smythe. Mr. Hayward, ashamed of being called "cattle-keeper," has transformed himself into Howard, as if he hoped to smuggle himself among the connections of the greatest of ducal houses. Dean Swift, speaking of these devices to change the vulgar into the genteel by the change of a letter, says: "I know a citizen who adds or alters a letter in his name with every plum he acquires; he now wants only the change of a vowel to be allied to a sovereign prince, Farnese, in Italy, and that perhaps he may contrive to be done by a mistake of the graver upon his tombstone." Mr. Lower tells a good story of a Tailor who had been thus dignified, and who haughtily demanded of a farmer the name of his dog. The answer was: "Why, sir, his proper name is Jowler, but since he's a consequential kind of puppy, we calls him Jowleure!"

Of the Saxon patronymics the most fruitful is *son*, with which is mingled inseparably the genitive letter *s*. Thus from the Christian name *Adam* are derived Adams, Adamson, Addison; from *Andrew*, Andrews, Anderson; from *Dennis*, Dennison, Jennison; from *Henry*, Henrison, Harris, Harrison, Hawes, Hawkins; from *John*, Johns, Jones, Jonson, Johnson, Jennings, Jenks, Jenkinson, Jackson, Jockins; from *William*, Williamson, Williams, Wilson, Wills, Wilkins, Wilkinson, Wells; from *Walter*, Watson, Watts,

Watkins. From the Old Saxon derivation *ing*, signifying offspring, it is said that we get over two thousand proper names. Browning and Whiting are dark and white offspring. The termination *kin*, derived from the ancient *cyn*, meaning "race," is found in a yet greater number of names; while from the termination *ock* (as in Pollock, from Paul, and contracted into Polk) are obtained comparatively few names. Scandinavian mythology has contributed a few names to our English list. From *Thor* we have Thoresby, Thursby, and Thurlow.

Among the surnames derived from personal qualities, we have Russell, "red"; Gough, also "red"; Snell, "agile" or "hardy"; Read, Reid, or Reed, an old spelling of "red"; Duff, "black"; Vaughan, "little"; Longfellow, Moody, Goodenough, Toogood, and hundreds of others. Farebrother is a Scottish name for "uncle"; Waller means a "pilgrim," or "stranger." Of Puritan surnames derived from the virtues, Be-courteous Cole, Search-the-Scriptures Moreton, Fly-fornication Richardson, Kill-sin Pemble, Fight-the-good-fight-of-faith White, are examples. Surnames have even been derived from oaths, and other such exclamations. Profane swearing was a common vice in the early times, and when men habitually interlarded their conversations with oaths, they became sobriquets by which they were known. Just as Say-Say became the title of an old gentleman who always began a remark with "I say-say, old boy," so a profane exclamation, repeatedly uttered, became a proper name. Godkin, Blood, and *Sacré* are said to be clipped oaths. Parsall is corrupted from *Par Ciel*, "By Heaven," Pardoe from *Par Dieu*, and Godsall and Godbody from "By the soul and body of God!" the shocking but favorite oath of Edward III.

There are names which in the social circle will provoke a smile, in spite of every attempt to preserve one's gravity; others that excite horror, hate, or contempt; and others which, inviting cheap puns and gibes, irritate the minds of the calmest men. Shenstone thanked God that his name was not liable to a pun. There is a large class of names indicative of personal blemishes or moral obliquities, such as Asse, Goose, Lazy, Leatherhead, Addlehead, Milksop, Mudd, Pighead, Trollope, Hussey, Silliman, Cruickshank, Blackmonster, etc. In many countries Devil is a surname. Kennard, once Kaynard, means "you dog," also a "rascal." The Romans had their Plauti, Pandi, Vari, and Scauri, that is, the Splay-foots, the Bandy-legs, the In-knees, and the Club-foots. Cocles means "one-eyed"; Flaccus, one of the names of Horace, "flap-eared"; and Naso points to a long "nose." Cæsar, from whose name come the German *Kaiser* and the Russian *Czar*, was so called (or, at least, the first Roman with the name was so called) from his coming into the world with long hair (*cæsaries*), or from his unnatural mode of birth (*a* CÆSO *matris utero*). Who would introduce Mr. Shakelady into the circle of his friends, and what worthy deeds could be expected from a Doolittle? Who can blame Dr. Jacob Quackenboss for dropping a couple of syllables and the quack at the same time from his name, and becoming Jacob Bush, M.D.? Who can help sympathizing with Mr. Death, who asked the Legislature of Massachusetts to change his name to one less sepulchral; or with Mr. Wormwood, who petitioned for liberty to assume the name of Washington, declaring that the intense sufferings of so many years of wormwood existence deserved the compensation of a great and glorious name? Louis XI was less justified in changing the name of his barber,

Olivier le Diable, into Olivier le Mauvais, then to Olivier le Malin, and then into Olivier le Daim, at the same time forbidding his former names ever to be mentioned. On the other hand, the ill-omened name of Maria Theresa's noble minister, Thunichtgut, "Do-no-good," was rightfully changed by the Empress into Thugut, "Do-good." The original name of the great French writer, Balzac, was Guez, "a beggar." Men who inherit names originally given in contempt and scorn have this compensation, that, as many a hump-backed and ugly-looking man has found in his deformity "a perpetual spur to rescue and deliver him from scorn," so the inheritors of mean or degrading names are provoked and stimulated, as we see in the case of Brutus, "stupid," to redeem them from their degradation by noble deeds, and make them for centuries the watchwords of humanity.

The dislike to vulgar and cacophonous names led some scholars and others, at an early period, to adopt Greek or Latin forms. The native name of Erasmus was Gherærd Gherærds. The root of Gherærd is a verb meaning "to desire," and so the great scholar Latinized his Christian name into Desiderius, and Græcized his surname into Erasmus, both signifying the same thing. The name of Luther's friend, the celebrated theologian and reformer, Melanchthon, is a translation of the German Schwarzerde, or "Black Earth."

Considering the great variety of English proper names,— representing, as they do, nearly all the nationalities of Europe,— it is not strange that they have suffered much from corruption. The causes of this corruption have been the wear and tear of time and usage; the repetition of foreign sounds by alien lips; the falling of those sounds

upon a dull or deafened ear; their disguisement by too thick or too thin an utterance; incorrect spelling; the practice of pronouncing the words as they were written; and the fluctuations of orthography. Many Norman names have been so mutilated, that their owners, if they could see them, would find them unintelligible. Thus we have Darcy from Adrecy, Boswell from Bosseville, Loring from Lorraine, and Taille-bois has been changed into Tallboys! Paganus became first Painim, and then Payne. But the most unhappy victims of this corrupting tendency were four Normans, whose names were anglicized from honorable into the most ill-omened and repulsive appellations. One, called De-Ath, became Death; another, De-Ville, was transformed into a Devil; and the third, Scardeville, is now Skarfield, and — *horresco referens* — Scaredevil!

It is natural to suppose that all families bearing English names are of English extraction; but there are examples of the contrary. The descendant of a German family, whose name in the Old World was Brückenbauer, calls himself in this country Bridgebuilder. A German called Feuerstein ("firestone," or "flint"), having settled among a French population in the West, changed his name to Pierre à Fusil; but, the Anglo-American population becoming after a while the leading one, Pierre à Fusil was transformed into the pithy Peter Gun!

Mr. Lower gives an interesting account of the origin of certain famous historical names. The name of Fortescue was bestowed on Sir Richard le Forte, a leader in the Conqueror's army, because he protected his chief at the battle of Hastings by bearing before him a massive *escu*, or shield. The name of Lockhart was originally given to a follower of Lord Douglas, who accompanied him to the

Holy Land with the heart of King Robert Bruce. Hence some of the family bear a padlock enclosing a heart in their arms. The illustrious surname of Plantagenet, borne by eight kings of England, originally belonged to Fulke, the Count of Anjou, in the twelfth century. To expiate certain flagrant crimes of which he had been guilty, he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and wore in his cap, as a mark of humility, a *planta genista*, or "broom-plant," and hence was surnamed Plantagenet. Another version of the story is that he suffered himself to be beaten with "broom-twigs," *plantagananstæ*. The Scottish name, Turnbull, is said to have been given to a strong man, one Ruel, who "turned" by the head, a wild "bull" which ran violently against King Robert Bruce in Stirling Park. The celebrated and numerous Scottish family of Armstrong derive their surname from an ancestor who was an armor-bearer, and by whom an ancient King of Scotland was remounted, after his horse had been killed under him in battle. The Halidays were named from their war cry, "A holy day"; every day being holy, in their estimation, that was spent in ravaging the enemy's country. A poor child, picked up at Newark-upon-Trent, was called by the inhabitants Tom Among Us. Becoming eminent, he was employed in several embassies, and changed his name to the dignified one of Dr. Thomas Magnus. Though the earliest names were short and simple, yet there appears to have prevailed, even in the olden times, a taste for long and sounding names. In a note to Coleridge's "Literary Biography," mention is made of an author whose name is of fearful length,—Abul Waled Mohammed Ebn Ashmed Ebn Mohammed Ebn Raschid. Think of the time wasted in speaking and writing

such an appellation, which, unless he was blessed with a very tenacious memory, its owner himself must have been sometimes puzzled to recollect! The polytitled Arab, whose name thus "drags, like a wounded snake, its slow length along," was born at Corinth about 1150, and died in Morocco in 1206. The Spaniards have been noted, beyond all other peoples, for a passion for voluminous and dignified names; and to enlarge them, they often add their places of residence. This is amusingly illustrated by a story told by Fuller in his "Worthies." A rich citizen, of the name of John Cuts, was ordered by Queen Elizabeth to receive and entertain the Spanish ambassador; but the don was greatly displeased, feeling that he was disparaged by being placed with a man whose name was so ridiculously short, and who, consequently, could never have achieved anything great or honorable; but when he found that the hospitality of his host had nothing monosyllabic about it, but more than made up for the brevity of his name, he was reconciled. Lucian tells of one Simon, who, coming to a considerable fortune, aggrandized his name to Simonides. Diocles, becoming emperor, lengthened his name to Dioclesian; and Bruna, Queen of France, tried to give regal pomp to her name by transforming it to Brunehault.

Oddities, eccentricities, and happy accidents of names are common to all languages, and open a wide field of playful speculation and research. What queer yet felicitous conjunctions are Preserved Fish, Virginia Weed, Dunn Browne, Mahogany Coffin, and Return Swift? Especially remarkable is the extent to which the occupations of men harmonize with their surnames. In London, Gin & Ginman, and Alehouse are publicans. Portwine and

Negus are licensed victuallers, one in Westminster, the other in Bishopsgate street. Seaman is the host of the Ship Hotel, and A. King keeps the Crown and Sceptre. Pye is a pastry cook, and Fitall and Treadaway are shoemakers. Mr. Weinmann sells sherries, madeiras, etc., in Chicago, and Mr. Silverman is a noted banker. It is a striking fact that Mr. Loud and Mr. Thunder were, some years ago, both organists in the same American town; and we must acknowledge that few names could harmonize better, or accord more happily with the double diapason and the swell to which their professional duties accustomed them. What name could be more picturesque for a pot-boy than Corker, for a dentist than Tugwell, or for an editor of "Punch" than Mark Lemon? What happier appellation for the owner of a line of stage coaches than Jehu Golightly, the name of a southern proprietor, which the incredulous passenger refused to believe accidental?

Sometimes the name harmonizes ill with, or is positively antagonistic to, the occupation or character. The amiable and witty banker-poet, Horace Smith, even declares that "surnames ever go by contraries," and, as proof, says:

"Mr. Barker's as mute as a fish in the sea,
Mr. Miles never moves on a journey,
Mr. Go-to-bed sits up till half-past three,
Mr. Makepeace was bred an attorney.

Mr. Gardener can't tell a flower from a root,
Mr. Wild with timidity draws back;
Mr. Rider performs all his travels on foot,
Mr. Foote all his journeys on horseback."

Ward and Lock, who should sell bank safes, are book publishers. Neal and Pray was the title of a house in New England, that was by no means given to devotion.

Butcher, Death, Slaughter, Churchyard, and Coffin were the names of so many London surgeons and apothecaries. Partnerships often show a curious conjunction of names; as Lamb & Hare, Holland & Sherry, Carpenter & Wood, Spinage & Lamb, Flint & Steel, Foot & Stocking, hosiers, Rumfit & Cutwell, tailors, Robb & Steel, and, above all, I. Ketchum & U. Cheatham, the immortal names of two New York brokers. Not only business but hymeneal partnerships reveal some singular combinations; as when Mr. Good marries Miss Evil, when George Virtue is united to Susan Vice, and when Benjamin Bird, aged sixty, is wedded to Julia Chaff, aged twenty, showing that, in spite of the old saw, "an old bird" may be "caught by chaff."

Punning upon names has always been a favorite amusement with those

> "Who think it legitimate fun
> To be blazing away at every one
> With a regular double-loaded gun."

When the defender of a certain extortioner, whom Lutatius Catulus accused, attempted by a sarcasm to disconcert his vehement adversary, saying, "Why do you bark, little dog?" ("*Quid latras, Catule?*") "Because I saw a thief," retorted Catulus. Shakespeare makes Falstaff play upon his swaggering ancient's name, telling Pistol he will double charge him with sack, or dismissing him with—"No more, Pistol; I would not have you go off here; discharge yourself of our company, Pistol." When a man named Silver was arraigned before Sir Thomas More, he said: "*Silver*, you must be *tried by fire*." "Yes," replied the prisoner, "but you know, my lord, that Quick *Silver* cannot abide the fire." The man's wit procured his discharge. An old gentleman by the name of Gould, having married a very

young wife, wrote to a friend informing him of his good fortune, concluding with

> "So you see, my dear sir, though I'm eighty years old
> A girl of eighteen is in love with old Gould."

To this his friend replied:

> "A girl of eighteen may love, it is true,
> But believe me, dear sir, it is Gold without U."

When a Bishop Goodenough was appointed to his office, a certain dignitary who had hoped, but failed, to get the appointment, was asked the secret of his disappointment, and replied: "Because I was not Goodenough."

Fuller, in his "Grave Thoughts," tells an anecdote which shows that where the punning propensity exists, no occasion or subject, however solemn, will prevent it from finding expression: "When worthy Master Hern, famous for his living, preaching, and writing, lay on his deathbed (rich only in goodness and children), his wife made such womanish lamentations, what should become of her little ones? 'Peace! sweet-heart,' said he; 'that God who feedeth the ravens will not starve the herns;' a speech censured as light by some, observed by others as prophetical; as indeed it came to pass that they were all well disposed of." It is said that John Huss, when burning at the stake, fixed his eyes steadfastly upon the spectators, and said with much solemnity: "They burn a *goose*, but in a hundred years a *swan* will arise out of the ashes;" words which many years afterward were regarded as predicting the great Protestant reformer,— Huss signifying "a goose," and Luther, "a swan."

There are occasions, however, when, as Sir William F. Napier once wrote to a friend, in excusing himself for making some bad puns, "a bitter feeling turns to humor

to avoid cursing;" and it is certain that it was from no desire to display his wit, that Æschylus devoted twelve lines of "a splendid and passionate chorus" to a denunciation of

"Sweet Helen,
Hell in her name, but Heaven in her looks."

Even Dr. Johnson, a professed hater of puns, could not resist the temptation, when introduced to Mrs. Barbauld, of growling, "*Bare-bald!* why, that's the very *pleonasm of baldness!*"

At the beginning of this chapter some remarks were made on the names of children, and with a few words further on the same theme I will end. Too often the boy or girl is named after the father or mother, taking the names, however ugly, ill-sounding, or uneuphonious, that have been handed down in the family from generation to generation, without a thought of the cruelty inflicted on the unconscious babe by fastening Ebenezer or Tabitha on it for life. Where this folly is avoided by parents, they often outrage their sons by baptizing them George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, or Andrew Jackson, or worse still, loading them with classical names, like those of which Ex-President Grant is a conspicuous victim. The whims, freaks, and eccentricities which dictate the names of children are as inexplicable as they are multifarious. At a United States census some years ago, record was obtained of a man who had named his five children Imprimis, Finis, Appendix, Addendum, and Erratum. It has been suggested that had there been a sixth, he would probably have been Supplement. Everybody is familiar with the story of a worthy lady, who, having named four sons successively Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, insisted on

calling the fifth Acts,—a perversity equalled by that of the father of ten children, who, having been blessed with three more, named them Moreover, Nevertheless, and Notwithstanding. No doubt these last appellatives are mythical; but it is positively certain that names are often given to children, which, being utterly incongruous with their looks, descent, or character, rendering them targets for coarse jests, or raising expectations that are sure to be falsified, are productive to their bearers, if they are at all sensitive, of an incalculable amount of suffering. In naming a child his individuality should, first of all, be recognized. Instead of being invested with the cast-off appellation of some dead ancestor, as musty as the clothes he wore,—a ghostly index-finger forever pointing to the past,—he should have a fresh name, free from all ridiculous or unpleasant associations, congruous with his probable destiny, and suggestive of a history to be filled, a life of usefulness to be lived. If such a name cannot be invented, let him bear the plain, honest one of John, Edward, or Robert, which affords no opportunity for gibes, and consequent heart-burnings, promises nothing, disappoints nobody, and yet may be transfigured and glorified by the noblest and most illustrious deeds.

CHAPTER XIV.

NICKNAMES.

The word "nick" in nickname is cognate with the German word *necken*, to mock, to quiz, and the English word "nag," to tease, or provoke.—W. L. Blackley, *Word-Gossip.*

A good name will wear out, a bad one may be turned; a nickname lasts forever.—Zimmerman.

J'ai été toujours étonné que les Familles qui portent un Nom odieux ou ridicule, ne le quittent pas.—Bayle.

AMONG the books that need to be written, one of the most instructive would be a treatise on the history and influence of nicknames. Philosophers who study the great events in the world's history, are too apt, in their eagerness to discover adequate causes, to overlook the apparently trifling means by which mankind are influenced. They are eloquent enough upon the dawning of a new idea in the world, when its effects are set forth in all the pomp of elaborate histories and disquisitions; but they would do a greater service by showing how and when, by being condensed into a pithy word or phrase, it wins the acceptance of mankind. The influence of songs upon a people in times of excitement and revolution is familiar to all. "When the French mob began to sing the Marseillaise, they had evidently caught the spirit of the revolution; and what a song is to a political essay, a nickname is to a song." In itself such a means of influence may seem trivial; and yet history shows that it is no easy thing to estimate the force of these ingenious appellations.

The name of a man is not a mere label, which may be detached, as one detaches a label from a piece of lifeless furniture. As Goethe once feelingly said, it is not like a cloak, which only hangs about a man, and at which one may at any rate be allowed to pull and twitch; but it is a close-fitting garment, which has grown over and over him, like his skin, and which one cannot scrape and flay without injuring himself. Names not only represent certain facts or thoughts, but they powerfully mould the facts and thoughts which they represent. Men have borne names which they have felt to be stigmas, an active cause of discouragement and failure to their dying day; and they have borne names, inherited from their ancestors, which have lifted them above themselves, by bringing them into fellowship with a past of high effort or generous sacrifice.

In politics, it has long been observed that no orator can compare for a moment in effect with him who can give apt and telling nicknames. Brevity is the soul of wit, and of all eloquence a nickname is the most concise and irresistible. It is a terse, pointed, short-hand mode of reasoning, condensing a volume of meaning into an epithet, and is especially popular in these days of steam and electric telegraphs, because it saves the trouble of thinking. There is a deep instinct in man which prompts him, when engaged in any controversy, whether of tongue or pen, to assume to himself some honorable name which begs the whole matter in dispute, and at the same time to fasten on his adversary a name which shall render him ridiculous, odious, or contemptible. By facts and logic you may command the assent of the few; but by nicknames you may enlist the passions of the million on your

side. Who can doubt that when, in the English civil wars, the parliamentary party styled themselves "the Godly" and their opponents "the Malignants," the question at issue, wherever entrance could be gained for these words, was already decided? Who can estimate how much the Whig party in this country was damaged by the derisive sarcasm, "All the decency," or its opponents by the appellation of "Locofocos"? Is it not certain that the odious name "Copperheads," which was so early in our late civil war affixed to the northern sympathizers with the South, had an incalculable influence in gagging them, and in preventing their numbers from multiplying?

It has been truly said that in the distracted times of early revolution, any nickname, however vague, will fully answer a purpose, though neither those who are blackened by the odium, nor those who cast it, can define the hateful appellative. The historian Hume says that when the term "Delinquents" came into vogue in England, it expressed a degree and species of guilt not easily known or ascertained. It served, however, the end of those revolutionists who had coined it, by involving any person in, or coloring any action by, "delinquency"; and many of the nobility and gentry were, without any questions being asked, suddenly discovered to have committed the crime of "delinquency." The degree in which the political opinions of our countrymen were influenced, and their feelings embittered, some forty years ago, by the appellation "Federalist," cannot be easily estimated. The fact that many who heard the derisive title knew not its origin, and some not even its meaning, did not lessen its influence, — as an incident related by Judge Gaston of North Carolina well illustrates. In travelling on his circuit through

the backwoods of that state, he learned that the people of a certain town had elected a Democrat, in place of a Whig, to serve them in the legislature. When asked the reason of this change, his informant, an honest, rough-looking citizen, replied: "Oh, we didn't reëlect Mr. A, because he is a *fetheral*." "A fetheral!" exclaimed the judge, "what is a fetheral?" "I don't know," was the reply, "but *it ain't a human*."

There is no man so insignificant that he may not blast the reputation of another by fastening upon him an odious or ludicrous nickname. Even the most shining character may thus be dragged down by the very reptiles of the race to the depths of infamy. A parrot may be taught to call names, and, if you have a spite against your neighbor, may be made to give him a deal of annoyance, without much wit either in the employer or the puppet. Goethe felt this when he made the remark above quoted, which was provoked by a coarse pun made on his name by Herder. Though no man could better afford to despise such a jest, it rankled, apparently, even in his great mind; for, forty years later, after Herder's death, he spoke of it bitterly, in the course of a very kindly criticism upon that writer, as an instance of the sarcasm which often rendered him unamiable. Hotspur would have had a starling taught to speak nothing but "Mortimer" in the ears of his enemy. An insulting or degrading epithet will stick to a man long after it has been proved malicious or false. Who could dissociate with the name of Van Buren the idea of craft or cunning, after he had become known as the "Kinderhook Fox"; or who ever venerated John Tyler as the Chief Magistrate of the nation, after he had been politically baptized as "His Accidency"? Who can tell how far

General Scott's prospects for the Presidency were damaged by the contemptuous nickname of "Old Fuss and Feathers"; especially after he had nearly signed his own political death-warrant by that fatal allusion to "a hasty plate of soup," which convulsed the nation with laughter from the St. Croix to the Rio Grande? The hero of Chippewa found it hard to breast the torrent of ridicule which this derisive title brought down upon him. It would have been easier far to stand up against the iron shock of the battle-field. Who, again, has forgotten how a would-be naval bard of America was "damned to everlasting fame" by a verbal tin-pail attached to his name in the form of one of his own verses?* "I have heard an eminent character boast," says Hazlitt, "that he did more to produce the war with Bonaparte by nicknaming him 'The Corsican,' than all the state papers and documents on the subject put together." "Give a dog a bad name," says the proverb, "and you hang him." It was only necessary to nickname Burke "The Dinner Bell," to make even *his* rising to speak a signal for a general emptying of the house.

The first step in overthrowing any great social wrong is to fix upon it a name which expresses its character. From the hour when "taxation without representation" came to be regarded by our fathers as a synonym for "tyranny," the cause of the colonies was safe. Had the southern slaves been called by no other name than that used by their masters,—namely, "servants,"—they would have been kept in bondage till they had won their freedom by the sword.

The French Revolution of 1789 was fruitful of examples

*"The sun has gone down with his battle-stained eye."

showing the ease with which ignorant men are led and excited by words whose real import and tendency they do not understand, and illustrating the truth of South's remark, that a plausible and insignificant word in the mouth of an expert demagogue is a dangerous and destructive weapon. Napoleon was aware of this, when he declared that "it is by epithets that you govern mankind." Destroy men's reverence for the names of institutions hoary with age, and you destroy the institutions themselves. "Pull down the nests," John Knox used to say, "and the rooks will fly away." The people of Versailles insulted with impunity in the streets, and at the gates of the Assembly, those whom they called "Aristocrats"; and the magic power of the word was doubled, when aided by the further device of calling the usurping Commons the "National Assembly." When the title of *Frondeurs*, or "the Slingers," was given to Cardinal de Retz's party, he encouraged its application, "for we observed," says he, "that the distinction of a name healed the minds of the people." The French showman, who, when royalty and its forms were abolished in France, changed the name of his "*Royal* Tiger," so called,— the pride of his menagerie,—to "*National* Tiger," showed a profound knowledge of his countrymen and of the catchwords by which to win their patronage.

A nickname is the most stinging of all species of satire, because it gives no chance of reply. Attack a man with specific, point-blank charges, and he can meet and repel them; but a nickname baffles reply by its very vagueness; it presents no tangible or definite idea to the mind, no horn of a dilemma with which the victim can grapple. The very attempt to defend himself only renders him the more ridiculous; it looks like raising an ocean to drown a fly, or

firing a cannon at a wasp, to meet a petty gibe with formal testimony or elaborate argument. Or, if your defence is listened to without jeers, it avails you nothing. It has no effect,— does not tell,— excites no sensation. The laugh is against you, and all your protests come like the physician's prescription at the funeral, too late.

The significance of nicknames is strikingly illustrated by the fact that, as a late writer suggests, you cannot properly hate a man of different opinions from your own till you have labelled him with some unpleasant epithet. In theological debates, a heretic may be defined as a man with a nickname. Till we have succeeded in fastening a name upon him, he is confounded among the general mass of the orthodox; his peculiarities are presumably not sufficient to constitute him into a separate species. But let the name come to us by a flash of inspiration, and how it sticks to the victim through his whole life! There is a refinement of cruelty in some nicknames which resembles the barbarity of the old heathen persecutors, who wrapped up Christians in the skins of wild beasts, so that they might be worried and torn in pieces by dogs. "Do but paint an angel black," says an old divine, "and that is enough to make him pass for a devil." On the other hand, there are loving nicknames, which are given to men by their friends,— especially to those who are of a frank, genial, companionable nature. The name of Charles Lamb was ingeniously transformed into the Latin diminutive *Carlagnulus ;* and the friends of Keats, in allusion to his occasional excess of fun and animal spirits, punned upon his name, shortening it from John Keats into "Junkets."

That prince of polemics, Cobbett, was a masterly inventor of nicknames, and some of his felicitous epithets will

not be forgotten for many years to come. Among the witty labels with which he ticketed his enemies were "Scorpion Stanley," "Spinning Jenny Peel," "the pink-nosed Liverpool," "the unbaptized, buttonless blackguards" (applied to the Quakers), and "Prosperity Robinson." The nickname, "Old Glory," given by him, stuck for life to Sir Francis Burdett, his former patron and life-long creditor. "Æolus Canning" provoked unextinguishable laughter among high and low; and it is said that of all the devices to annoy the brilliant but vain Lord Erskine, none was more teasing than being constantly addressed by his second title of "Baron Clackmannon." One of the literary tricks of Carlyle is to heap contemptuous nicknames upon the objects he dislikes; as, "The Dismal Science" of Political Economy, "The Nigger Question," "Pig Philosophy," "Horse-hair and Bombazine Procedure," etc.

The meaning of nicknames, as of many other words, is often a mystery. Often they are apparently meaningless, and incapable of any rational explanation; yet they are probably due, in such cases, to some subtle, imperceptible analogy, of which even their authors were hardly conscious, When the English and French armies were encamped in the Crimea, they, by common consent, called the Turks "Bono Johny;" but it would not be easy to tell why. A late French prince was called "Plomb-plomb"; yet there is no such word in the French language, and different accounts have been given of its origin. To explain, again, why nicknames have such an influence,—so magical an effect,—is equally difficult; one might as well try to explain why certain combinations of colors or musical sounds impart an exquisite pleasure. All we know, upon both these points, is, that certain persons are doomed to be

known by a nickname; at the time of life when the word-making faculty is in the highest activity, all their acquaintances are long in labor to hit off the fit appellation; suddenly it comes like an electric spark, and it is felt by everybody to be impossible to think of the victim without his appropriate designation. In vain have his godfathers and godmothers called him Robert or Thomas; "Bob," or "Tom," or something wholly unrelated to these, he is fated to be to the end of his days.

Many of the happiest of these headmarks, which stick like a burr from the moment they are invented, are from sources utterly unknown; they appear, they are on everybody's lips, but whence they came nobody can tell. One of the commonest ways in which nicknames are suggested is by some egregious blunder which one makes. Thus, I knew a schoolboy to be asked who demolished Carthage, and upon his answering "Scorpio Africanus," to be promptly nicknamed "Old Scorp." Another way is by a glaring contradiction between a man's name and his character,— when he is ridiculed as sailing under false colors, or claiming a merit which does not belong to him. There is in all men, as Trench has observed, a sense of the significance of names,— a feeling that they ought to be, and in a world of absolute truth would be, the utterance of the innermost character or qualities of the persons that bear them; and hence nothing is more telling in a personal controversy than the exposure of a striking incongruity between a name and the person who owns it. I have been told that the late President Lincoln, on being introduced to a very stout person by the name of Small, remarked, "Small, Small! Well, what strange names they do give men, to be sure! Why, they've got a fellow down

in Virginia whom they call *Wise!*" In the same spirit, Jerome, one of the Fathers of the Church, being engaged in controversy with one Vigilantius, *i.e.*, "the Watchful," about certain vigils which the latter opposed, stigmatized him as Dormitantius, or "the Sleeper." But more frequently the nickname is suggested by the real name where there is no such antagonism between them,—where the latter, as it is, or by a slight change, can be made to contain a confession of the ignorance or folly of the bearer. Thus, Tiberius Claudius Nero, in allusion to his drunkenness, was called "Biberius Caldius Mero"; and the Arians were nicknamed "Ariomanites." What can be happier in this way than the "Brand of Hell," applied to Pope Hildebrand; the title of "Slanders," affixed by Fuller to Sanders, the foul-mouthed libeller of Queen Elizabeth; the "Vanity" and "Sterility," which Baxter coined from the names of Vane and Sterry; and the term "Sweepnet," which that skilful master of the passions, Cicero, gave to the infamous Prætor of Sicily, whose name, Verres (*verro*), was prophetic of his "sweeping" the province,—declaring that others might be partial to the *jus verrinum* (which might mean verrine law or boar sauce), but not he? On the other hand, the nickname *Schinokephalos*, or "onion-head," which the Athenians gave to Pericles on account of the shape of his head, was unredeemed by wit or humor.

The people of Italy are exceedingly fond of nicknames; and it is an odd peculiarity of many which they give that the persons so characterized are known only by their nicknames. In the case of many celebrated persons the nickname has wholly obliterated the true name. Thus *Guercino* "Squint Eye," *Masaccio* "Dirty Tom," *Tintoretto* "The Little Dyer," *Ghirlandaio* "The Garland-Maker,"

Luca del Robbia "Luke of the Madder," *Spagnoletto* "The Little Spaniard," and *Del Sarto* "The Tailor's Son," would scarcely be recognized under their proper names of Barbieri, Guido, Robusti, Barbarelli, Corradi, Ribera, and Vannachi. The following, too, are all nicknames of eminent persons derived from their places of birth: Perugino, Veronese, Aretino, Pisano, Giulio Romano, Correggio, Parmegiano.*

There is probably no country, unless it be our own, in which nicknames have flourished more than in England. Every party there has had its watchwords with which to rally its members, or to set on its own bandogs to worry and tear those of another faction; and what is quite extraordinary is, that many of the names of political parties and religious sects were originally nicknames given in the bitterest scorn and party hate, yet ultimately accepted by the party themselves. Thus "Tory" originally meant an Irish freebooting bog-trotter,— an outlaw who favored the cause of James II; and "Whig" is derived from the Scotch name for sour milk, which was supposed aptly to characterize the disposition of the Republicans. "Methodists" was a name given in 1729, first to John and Charles Wesley at Oxford, on account of their close observance of system and method in their studies and worship, and afterward to their followers. So in other countries, the "Lutherans" received their name, in which they now glory, from their antagonists. "Capuchin" was a jesting name given by the boys in the streets to certain Franciscan monks, on account of the peaked and pointed hood (*capuccio*) which they wore. The Dominicans gloried all the more in their name when it was resolved by their enemies into *Domini*

* "Roba di Roma," by W. W. Story.

canes; they were proud to acknowledge that they were, indeed, "the Lord's watchdogs," who barked at the slightest appearance of heresy, and strove to drive it away. Finally, the highest name which any man can bear was originally a nickname given by the idle and witty inhabitants of Antioch, in Asia Minor. In the early days of Christianity, when the new faith was preached with all the vigor of intense conviction, and the enthusiasm attendant upon a fresh experiment in private and social morality; when the apostles were said to be "turning the world upside down," and were, indeed, promulgating a religion which was soon to revolutionize civilized society; there was, for a long time, great difficulty in finding a name for the new faith and its professors. The apostles, indeed, had no name for it whatever; they spoke of the nascent religion simply as "the way," or "this way." Paul says that he "persecuted *this way* unto the death," and at Ephesus, it is said, "there arose no small stir about *the way.*" By the Jews the converts to the new religion were called "Nazarenes," a term of contempt which they could not, of course, adopt. The Jews believed in the coming of a Messiah, though they rejected the true one; but the appearance of any Christ was a wholly new and original idea to the pagan world, and the constant repetition of the striking name of Christ in the discourses of the missionaries at Antioch, would have naturally suggested to the keen-witted Greek pagans around them to call them after the name of their Master. The Antiochenes were famous in all antiquity for their nicknames, for inventing which they had a positive genius; and it is altogether probable, — indeed, there is hardly a doubt,— that the name "Christian" was originally a term of ridicule or of reproach,

given by them to the first converts from paganism. It was, in fact, a nickname, designed to intimate that the teachers and the taught, who talked continually about their Christ, were a set of fanatics who deserved only to be laughed at for their infatuation. But what was thus meant as an insult was instantly accepted by the believers in Christ as a title of honor, implying that devotion to Christ was not an accident, but the very essence and soul of their religion. "Nothing else," says Canon Liddon, "expressed so tersely the central reason for the fierce antagonism of the pagans to the new religion: it was the religion of the divine, but crucified Christ; nothing else expressed so adequately the Christian sense of what Christianity was and is,—a religion not merely founded by Christ, but centring in Christ, so that, apart from Him, it has, properly speaking, no existence, so that it exists only as an extension and perpetuation of His life."

The Dutch people long prided themselves on the humiliating nickname of *Les Gueulx*, "the Beggars," which was given in 1566 to the revolters against the rule of Philip II. Margaret of Parma, then governor of the Netherlands, being somewhat disconcerted at the numbers of that party, when they presented a petition to her, was reassured by her minister, who remarked to her that there was nothing to be feared from a crowd of beggars. "Great was the indignation of all," says Motley, "that the state councillor (the Seigneur de Berlaymont) should have dared to stigmatize as beggars a band of gentlemen with the best blood of the land in their veins. Brederode, on the contrary, smoothing their anger, assured them with good humor that nothing could be more fortunate. 'They call us "beggars!"' said he; 'let us accept the name. We

will contend with the Inquisition, but remain loyal to the king, till compelled to wear the beggar's sack. . . Long live the beggars!' he cried, as he wiped his beard, and set the bowl down; '*Vivent les gueulx!*' Then, for the first time, from the lips of those reckless nobles rose the famous cry, which was so often to ring over land and sea, amid blazing cities, on blood-stained decks, through the smoke and carnage of many a stricken field. The humor of Brederode was hailed with deafening shouts of applause. The shibboleth was invented. The conjuration which they had been anxiously seeking was found. Their enemies had provided them with a spell, which was to prove, in after days, potent enough to start a spirit from palace or hovel, as the deeds of the 'wild beggars' the 'wood beggars,' and the 'beggars of the sea,' taught Philip at last to understand the nation which he had driven to madness."

In like manner the French Protestants accepted and gloried in the scornful nickname of the "Huguenots," as did the two fierce Italian factions in those of "Guelphs," or "Guelfs," and "Ghibellines." It was in the twelfth century, at the siege of Weinsberg, a hereditary possession of the Welfs, that the war-cries, "Hurrah for Welf!" "Hurrah for Waibling!" which gave rise to the party names, "Welfs" and "Waiblings" (Italicé, "Guelfs" and "Ghibellines"), were first heard. Even the title of the British "Premier," or "Prime Minister," now one of the highest dignity, was at first a nickname, given in pure mockery,—the statesman to whom it was applied being Sir Robert Walpole, as will be seen by the following words spoken by him in the House of Commons in 1742: "Having invested me with a kind of mock dignity, and styled me a 'Prime Minister,' they (the opposition) impute to me

an unpardonable abuse of the chimerical authority which *they* only created and conferred." It is remarkable that the nickname Cæsar has given the title to the heads of two great nations, Germany and Russia (*kaiser*, *czar*).

It is a fortunate thing when men who have been branded with names intended to make them hateful or ridiculous, can thus turn the tables on their *dénigreurs*, by accepting and glorying in their new titles. It was this which Lord Halifax did when he was called "a trimmer." Instead of quarrelling with the nickname, he exulted in it as a title of honor. "Everything good," he said, "trims between extremes. The temperate zone trims between the climate in which men are roasted, and the climate in which men are frozen. The English Church trims between the Anabaptist madness and the Papist lethargy. The English constitution trims between Turkish despotism and Polish anarchy. Virtue is nothing but a just temper between propensities, any one of which, indulged to excess, becomes vice. Nay, the perfection of the Supreme Being himself consists in the exact equilibrium of attributes, none of which could preponderate without disturbing the whole moral and physical order of the world." *

The nicknames "Quaker," "Puritan," "Roundhead," unlike those we have just named, were never accepted by those to whom they were given. "Puritan" was first heard in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was given to a party of purists who would have reformed the Reformation. They were also ridiculed, from their fastidiousness about trivial matters, as "Precisians"; Drayton characterizes them as persons that for a painted glass window

* Macaulay's "History of England," Vol. II.

would pull down the whole church. The distinction between "Roundhead" and "Cavalier" first appeared during the civil war between Charles I and his Parliament. A foe to all outward ornament, the "Roundhead" wore his hair cropped close, while the "Cavalier" was contradistinguished by his chivalrous tone, his romantic spirit, and his flowing locks.

All readers of history are familiar with "The Rump,"—the contemptuous nickname given to the Long Parliament at the close of its career. The "Rump," Mr. Disraeli remarks, became a perpetual whetstone for the loyal wits, till at length its former admirers, the rabble themselves, in town and country, vied with each other in burning rumps of beef, which were hung by chains on a gallows with a bonfire underneath, and proved how the people, like children, come at length to make a plaything of that which was once their bugbear.

A member of the British Parliament in the reign of George III is known as "Single-speech Hamilton," and is referred to by that designation as invariably as if it were his baptismal name. He made one, and but one, good speech during his parliamentary career. "Boot-jack Robinson" was the derisive title given to a mediocre politician, who, during a crisis in the ministry of the Duke of Newcastle, was made Home Secretary and ministerial leader of the House of Commons. "Sir Thomas Robinson lead us!" indignantly exclaimed Pitt to Fox; "the duke might as well send his boot-jack to lead us!" It is said that Mr. Dundas, afterward Lord Melville, got his nickname from a new word which he introduced in a speech in the House of Commons, in 1775, on the American war. He was the first to use the word "starvation" (a hybrid

formation. in which a Saxon root was united with a Latin ending), which provoked shouts of contemptuous laughter in the House; and he was always afterward called by his acquaintances, "Starvation Dundas." This poor specimen of word-coining was long resisted by the lexicographers; and one modern philological dictionary omits it even now; but it has long been sanctioned by usage. One of the most fatal nicknames ever given to a politician was one fastened by Sheridan upon Addington, the Prime Minister of England, in a speech made in Parliament in 1803. Addington was the son of an eminent physician, and something in his air and manner had given him, to a limited extent, the name of "the Doctor." Sheridan, alluding to the personal dislike of Addington felt by many, quoted the well known epigram of Martial:

"Non amo te, Sabine, nec possum dicere quare;
Hoc tantum possum dicere, non amo te;"

and added the English parody:

"I do not like thee, *Doctor* Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this, I'm sure, I know full well,
I do not like thee, *Doctor* Fell."

His droll emphasis on the word "Doctor," and the repetition of it in the course of the speech, drew forth peals of laughter; and henceforth the butt of his ridicule was generally known as "The Doctor." The Opposition newspapers caught up the title, and rang innumerable changes upon it, till finally the Prime Minister was fairly overwhelmed by the laughter of his enemies, and forced to resign his office.

Everybody has heard of "Ditto to Mr. Burke"; the victim of this title was a Mr. Conger, who was elected with

Burke to represent the city of Bristol. Utterly bewildered as to how to thank the electors after his associate's splendid speech, he condensed his own address into these significant words: "Gentlemen, I say ditto to Mr. Burke, ditto to Mr. Burke!" "Chicken Taylor" was the name which, in the early part of the century, long stuck to Mr. M. A. Taylor; he contended against a great lawyer in the House, and then apologized that he, "a chicken in the law, should venture on a fight with the cock of Westminster." "Adullamites," or "Dwellers in the Cave," the name given by Mr. Bright to Mr. Lowe and some of his Liberal friends,—a name derived from the Scripture story of David and his followers retiring to a cave,—will probably long continue to be applied to the members of a discontented faction.

Who does not remember the nickname, "The Spasmodic School of Poetry," which was given to three or four young poets some thirty years ago? It was in the brain of Professor Aytoun that this title originated, and immediately these writers, whose salient faults were thus felicitously hit off, were everywhere recognized as "spasmodists." For years after, no one of these minstrels could strike his lyre in public, even in the most humdrum, old-fashioned way, but the cry of "spasmodist" was raised so loudly that he was glad to retreat into his wonted obscurity. Even Ben Jonson, the sturdy old dramatist, did not escape a nickname. His envious rivals dubbed him "The Limestone and Mortar Poet," in allusion to his lack of spontaneity as a poet, and his having begun life as a bricklayer.

Among the other memorable English nicknames, that of "Jemmy Twitcher," taken from the chief of Macheath's gang in "The Beggar's Opera," and applied to Lord Sandwich,—that of "Orange Peel," given to Sir Robert Peel by

the Irish, the inveterate foes of the House of Orange,—"the stormy Petrel of debate," given to Mr. Bernal Osborne,—"Finality Russell," fastened upon Lord John Russell because he wished a certain Reform measure to be final,—"The Dandy Demagogue," given to Mr. T. S. Duncombe, the able parliamentary advocate of the people, who was distinguished by the remarkable elegance and finish of his attire,—the unique "Dizzy," into which his enemies condensed the name of the celebrated Jewish premier,—and the "Who? Who? Ministry," applied to Lord Derby's Cabinet in 1852,—are preëminently significant and telling. Among the hundreds of American political nicknames, there are many which are not remarkably expressive; others, like "Old Bullion" and "Old Hickory," are steeped in "the very brine of conceit," and sum up a character as if by inspiration.

It is a curious fact that some of the most damaging nicknames have been terms or epithets which were originally complimentary, but which, used sarcastically, have been associated with more ridicule or odium than the most opprobrious epithets. Men hate to be continually reminded of any one virtue of a fellow-man,—to hear the changes rung continually upon some one great action or daring feat he has performed. It seems, indeed, as if a man whose name is continually dinned in our ears, coupled with some complimentary epithet, some allusion to a praiseworthy deed which he once did, or some excellent trait of character, must be distinguished for nothing else. Unless this is his only virtue, why all this fuss and pother about it? The Athenians banished Aristides, because they were tired of hearing him called "the Just."

Some parents have so great a dread of nicknames that

they tax their ingenuity to invent for their children a Christian name that may defy nicking or abbreviation. With Southey's Doctor Dove, they think "it is not a good thing to be Tom'd or Bob'd, Jack'd or Jim'd, Sam'd or Ben'd, Natty'd or Batty'd, Neddy'd or Teddy'd, Will'd or Bill'd, Dick'd or Nick'd, Joe'd or Jerry'd, as you go through the world." The good doctor, however, had no such antipathy to the shortening of female names. "He never called any woman Mary, though *Mare*, he said, being the sea, was in many respects too emblematic of the sex. It was better to use a synonym of better omen, and Molly was therefore preferred, as being soft. If he accosted a vixen of that name in her worst temper, he Mollyfied her! On the contrary, he never could be induced to substitute Sally for Sarah. Sally, he said, had a salacious sound, and, moreover, it reminded him of rovers, which women ought not to be. Martha he called Patty, because it came pat to the tongue. Dorothy remained Dorothy, because it was neither fitting that women should be made Dolls, nor I-dols! Susan with him was always Sue, because women were to be sued, and Winnifred, Winny, because they were to be won." *

The annoyance which may be given to a man, even by an apparently meaningless nickname, which sticks to him wherever he goes, is well illustrated by a story told by Hazlitt in his "Conversations with Northcote," the painter. A village baker got, he knew not how, the name of "Tiddy-doll." He was teased and worried by it till it almost drove him crazy. The boys hallooed it after him in the streets, and poked their faces into his shop-windows; the parrots echoed the name as he passed their cages; and even the

* "The Doctor," Vol. VII.

soldiers took it up (for the place was a military station), and marched to parade, beating time with their feet, and singing "Tiddy-doll, Tiddy-doll," as they passed by his door. He flew out upon them at the sound with inextinguishable fury, was knocked down and rolled into the kennel, and got up in an agony of rage, his white clothes drabbled and bespattered with mud. A respectable and friendly gentleman in the neighborhood, who pitied his weakness, called him into his house one day, and remonstrated with him on the subject. He advised him to take no notice of his persecutors. "What," said he, "does it signify? Suppose they *do* call you 'Tiddy-doll?' What harm?" "*There,—there it is again!*" burst forth the infuriated baker; "you've called me so *yourself*. You called me in on purpose to insult me!" And, saying this, he vented his rage in a torrent of abusive epithets, and darted out of the house in a tempest of passion.

The readers of Boswell will remember, in connection with this subject, an amusing anecdote told of Dr. Johnson. Being rudely jostled and profanely addressed by a stout fish-woman, as he was passing through Billingsgate, he looked straight at her, and said deliberately, "You are a triangle!" which made her swear louder than before. He then called her "a rectangle! a parallelogram!" but she was more voluble still. At last he screamed out, "You are a miserable, wicked *hypothenuse!*" and she was struck dumb. Curran had a similar ludicrous encounter with a fish-woman at Cork. Taking up the gauntlet, when assailed by her on the quay, he speedily found that he was overmatched, and that he had nothing to do but to beat a retreat. "This, however, was to be done with dignity; so, drawing myself up disdainfully, I said, 'Madam, I scorn

all further discourse with such an *individual!*' She did not understand the word, and thought it, no doubt, the very hyperbole of opprobrium. 'Individual, you wagabond!' she screamed, 'what do you mean by that? I'm no more an individual than your mother was!' Never was victory more complete. The whole sisterhood did homage to me, and I left the quay of Cork covered with glory."

CHAPTER XV.

CURIOSITIES OF LANGUAGE.

Language is the depository of the accumulated body of experience, to which all former ages have contributed their part, and which is the inheritance of all yet to come.—J. S. Mill.

Often in words contemplated singly there are boundless stores of moral and historic truth, and no less of passion and imagination, laid up.—Trench.

A THOUGHTFUL English writer tells us that, when about nine years old, he learned with much surprise that the word "sincere" was derived from the practice of filling up flaws in furniture with wax, whence *sine cera* came to mean pure, not vamped up or adulterated. This explanation gave him great pleasure, and abode in his memory as having first shown him that there is a reason in words as well as things. There are few cultivated persons who have not felt, at some time in their lives, a thrill of surprise and delight like that of this writer. Throughout our whole lives, from the cradle to the grave, the stream of our history, inner and outer, runs wonderfully blended with the texture of the words we use. Dive into what subject we will, we never touch the bottom. The simplest prattle of a child is but the light surface of a deep sea containing many treasures. It would be hard, therefore, to find in the whole range of inquiry another study which at once is so fascinating, and so richly repays the labor, as that of the etymology or primitive significations of words.

It is an epoch in one's intellectual history when he first learns that words are living and not dead things,— that in

these children of the mind are incarnated the wit and wisdom, the poetic fancies and the deep intuitions, the passionate longings and the happy or sad experiences of many generations. The discovery is "like the dropping of scales from his eyes, like the acquiring of another sense, or the introduction into a new world;" he never ceases wondering at the moral marvels that everywhere reveal themselves to his gaze. To eyes thus opened, dictionaries, instead of seeming huge masses of word-lumber, become vast storehouses of historical memorials, than which none are more vital in spirit or more pregnant with meaning. It is not in oriental fairy-tales only that persons drop pearls every time they open their mouths; like Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it, we are dropping gems from our lips in almost every hour of the day. Not a thought, or feeling, or wish can we utter without recalling, by an unconscious sign or symbol, some historic fact, some memory of "auld lang syne," some bygone custom, some vanished superstition, some exploded prejudice, or some ethical divination that has lost its charm. Even the homeliest and most familiar words, the most hackneyed phrases, are connected by imperceptible ties with the hopes and fears, the reasonings and reflections, of bygone men and times.

Every generation of men inherits and uses all the scientific wealth of the past. "It is not merely the great and rich in the intellectual world who are thus blessed, but the humblest inquirer, while he puts his reasonings into words, benefits by the labors of the greatest. When he counts his little wealth, he finds he has in his hands coins which bear the image and superscription of ancient and modern intellectual dynasties, and that in virtue of this possession

acquisitions are in his power, solid knowledge within his reach, which none could ever have attained to, if it were not that the gold of truth once dug out of the mine circulates more and more widely among mankind." Emerson beautifully calls language "fossil poetry." The etymologist, he adds, finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. "As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long since ceased to remind us of their poetic origin."

Not only is this true, but many a single word, as Archbishop Trench remarks, is itself a concentrated poem, in which are treasured stores of poetical thought and imagery. Examine it closely, and it will be found to rest upon some palpable or subtle analogy of things material and spiritual, showing that, however trite the image now, the man who first coined the word was a poet. The older the word, the profounder and more beautiful the meanings it will often be found to inclose; for words of late growth speak to the head, not to the heart; thoughts and feelings are too subtle for new words, and are conveyed only by those about which cluster many associations. It is the use of words when new and fresh from the lips of their inventors, before their vivid and picturesque meanings have faded out or been obscured by their many secondary significations, that gives such pictorial beauty, pith, and raciness, to the early writers; "and hence to recall language, to restore its early meanings, to re-mint it in novel forms, is the secret of all effective writing and speaking,— of all verbal expression which is to leave, as was said of the eloquence of Pericles, stings in the minds and memories of the hearers."

Language is not only "fossil poetry," but it is also fossil philosophy, fossil ethics, and fossil history. As in the pre-Adamite rock are bound up and preserved the vegetable and animal forms of ages long gone by, so in words are locked up truths once known but now forgotten,—the thoughts and feelings, the habits, customs, opinions, virtues and vices of men long since in their graves. Language is, in short, "the depository of the accumulated body of experience, to which all former ages have contributed their part, and which is the inheritance of all yet to come."* It is "like amber, circulating the electric spirit of truth, and preserving the relics of ancient wisdom."† Compared with this memorial of the past, these records of ancient and modern intellectual dynasties, how poor are all other monuments of human power, perseverance, skill, or genius! Unlike the works of individual genius, or the cuneiform inscriptions which are found in oriental countries on the crumbling fragments of half-calcined stone, language gives us the history not only of individuals, but of nations; not only of nations, but of mankind. It is, indeed, "an admirable poem on the history of all ages; a living monument on which is written the genesis of human thought. Thus 'the ground on which our civilization stands is a sacred one, for it is the deposit of thought. For language, as it is the mirror, so it is the product of reason, and, as it embodies thought, so it is the child of thought. In it are embodied the sparks of that celestial fire which from a once bright centre of civilization has streamed forth over the inhabited earth, and which now already, after less than three myriads of years, forms a galaxy round the globe, a chain of light from pole to pole.'"

*Mill's "Logic." †Coleridge.

How pregnant with instruction is often the history of a single word! Coleridge, who keenly appreciated the significance of words, says that there are cases where more knowledge of more value may be conveyed by the history of a word than by the history of a campaign. Sometimes the germ of a nation's life,—the philosophy of some political, moral, or intellectual movement in a country,—will be found coiled up in a single word, just as the oak is found in an acorn. The word "ostracize" gives us a vivid picture of the Athenian democracy, and of the period when oyster-shells were used for ballots. It calls up the barbarity which held an election of candidates for banishment; the arbitrary power which enabled the vilest of the citizens, from mere envy of the reputation of the best man in the city, to make him an exile; and the utter lack and desecration of liberty, while its forms were fetiches for the popular worship. The fact that the Arabs were the arithmeticians, the astronomers, the chemists, and the merchants of the Middle Ages, is shown by the words we have borrowed from them,—"algebra," "almanac," "cypher," "zero," "zenith," "alkali," "alcohol," "alchemy," "alembic," "magazine," "tariff," "cotton," "elixir"; and so that the monastic system originated in the Greek, and not in the Latin church, is shown by the fact that the words expressing the chief elements of the system, as "monk," "monastery," "anchorite," "cenobite," "ascetic," "hermit," are Greek, not Latin. What an amount of history is wrapped up in the word "Pagan"! The term, we learn from Gibbon, is remotely derived from *Πάγη*, in the Doric dialect, signifying a fountain; and the rural neighborhood which frequented the same derived the common appellation of *Pagus* and "Pagans." Soon "Pa-

gan" and "rural" became nearly synonymous, and the meaner peasants acquired that name which has been corrupted into "peasant" in the modern languages of Europe. All non-military people soon came to be branded as Pagans. The Christians were the soldiers of Christ; their adversaries, who refused the "sacrament," or military oath of baptism, might deserve the metaphorical name of Pagans. Christianity gradually filled the cities of the empire; the old religion retired and languished, in the time of Prudentius, in obscure villages. From *Pagus*, as a root, comes *pagius*, first a villager, then a rural laborer, then a servant, lastly a "page." *Pagina*, first the inclosed square of cultivated land near a village, graduated into the "page" of a book. *Pagare*, from denoting the "field service" that compensated the provider of food and raiment, was applied eventually to every form in which the changes of society required the benefited to "pay" for what they received. Again, when a Scotchman speaks of his "shackle-bone," he not only conveys an idea of his wrist, but discovers by this very term that slavery, or vassalage, continued so long in Scotland as to impress itself indelibly on the language of the country.

Often where history is utterly dumb concerning the past, language speaks. The discovery of the foot-print on the sand did not more certainly prove to Robinson Crusoe that the island of which he had fancied himself the sole inhabitant contained a brother man, than the similarity of the inflections in the speech of different peoples proves their brotherhood. Were all the histories of England swept from existence, the study of its language,—developing the fact that the basis of the language is Saxon, that the names of the prominent objects of nature are

Celtic, the terms of war and government Norman-French, the ecclesiastical terms Latin,— would enable us to reconstruct a large part of the story of the past, as it even now enables us to verify many of the statements of the chroniclers. Humboldt, in his "Cosmos," eulogizes the study of words as one of the richest sources of historical knowledge; and it is probable that what comparative philology, yet in its infancy, has already discovered, will compel a rewriting of the history of the world. Even now it has thrown light on many of the most perplexing problems of religion, history, and ethnography; and it seems destined to triumphs of which we can but dimly apprehend the consequences. On the stone tablets of the universe God's own finger has written the changes which millions of years have wrought on the mountain and the plain; and in the fluid air, which he coins into spoken words, man has preserved forever the grand facts of his past history and the grand processes of his inmost soul. "Nations and *languages* against dynasties and treaties," is the cry which is remodelling the map of Europe; and in our country, comparative philologists,— to their shame be it said,— have labored with satanic zeal to prove the impossibility of a common origin of languages and races, in order to justify, by scientific arguments, the theory of slavery. It has been said that the interpretation of one word in the Vedas fifty years earlier would have saved many Hindoo widows from being burned alive; and now that the philologists of Germany and England have shown that the iron network of *caste*, which for centuries has hindered the development of India, is not a religious institution, and has no authority in their sacred writings, but is the invention of an arrogant and usurping priesthood,— or, at

best, an erroneous tradition, due to the half-knowledge or to the imposture of the native pundits,—the British government will be able to inflict penalties for the observance of the rules of *caste*, and thus to relieve India from the greatest clog on its progress.

CHANGES IN THE MEANING OF WORDS.

Language, as it daguerreotypes human thought, shares, as we have seen, in all the vicissitudes of man. It mirrors all the changes in the character, tastes, customs, and opinions of a people, and shows with unerring faithfulness whether, and in what degree, they advance or recede in culture or morality. As new ideas germinate in the mind of a nation, it will demand new forms of expression; on the other hand, a petrified and mechanical national mind will as surely betray itself in a petrified and mechanical language. It is by no accident or caprice that

> "Words, whilom flourishing,
> Pass now no more, but banished from the court,
> Dwell with disgrace among the vulgar sort:
> And those which eld's strict doom did disallow,
> And damn for bullion, go for current now."

Often with the lapse of time the meaning of a word changes imperceptibly, until after some centuries it becomes the very opposite of what it once was. To disinter these old meanings out of the alluvium and drift of ages affords as much pleasure to the linguist as to disinter a fossil does to the geologist.

An exact knowledge of the changes of signification which words have undergone is not merely a source of pleasure; it is absolutely indispensable to the full understanding of old authors. Thus, for example, Milton and Thomson use "horrent" and "horrid" for bristling, *e.g.*,

"With dangling ice all *horrid*."

Milton speaks of a "savage" (meaning woody, *silva*) hill, and of "amiable" (meaning lovely) fruit. Again, in the well known lines of the "Allegro," where, Milton says, amongst the cheerful sights of rural morn,

"And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the vale,"—

the words "tells his tale" do not mean that he is romancing or making love to the milkmaid, but that he is *counting his sheep* as they pass the hawthorn,—a natural and familiar occupation of shepherds on a summer's morning. The primary meaning of "tale" is to count or number, as in the German *zahlen.* It is thus used in the Book of Exodus, which states that the Israelites were compelled to deliver their "tale of bricks." In the English "tale" and in the French *conte* the secondary meaning has supplanted the first, though we still speak of "keeping tally," of "untold gold," and say, "Here is the sum twice-told."

Again, Milton's use of the word "jolly" in the following lines from his "Sonnet to the Nightingale," strikingly illustrates the disadvantages under which poetry in a living, and consequently ever-changing, language, labors:

"Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart doth fill,
While the jolly hours lead on propitious May."

Though we may know the meaning which the word bore a little more than two and a half centuries ago, yet it is impossible entirely to banish from the mind the vulgar associations which have gathered round it since.

It has been said that one of the arts of a great poet or prose-writer, who wishes to add emphasis to his style,—

to bring out all the latent forces of his native tongue,—will often consist in reconnecting a word with its original derivation, in not suffering it to forget itself and its father's house, though it would. This Milton does sometimes with signal effect; but in the great majority of cases his meaning becomes obscure to the unlearned reader. In a great number of cases we must interpret his words rather by their classical meanings than by their English use. Thus in "Paradise Lost," when Satan speaks of his having been pursued by "Heaven's *afflicting* thunder," the poet uses the word "afflicting" in its original primary sense of striking down bodily. Properly the word denotes a state of mind or feeling only, and is not used to-day in a concrete sense. So when Milton, at the opening of the same poem, speaks of

> "The *secret* top
> Of Oreb or of Sinai,"

the meaning of the word "secret" is not that of the English adjective, but is remote, apart, lonely, as in Virgil's *secretosque pios*. The absurdity of supposing the word to be the same as our ordinary adjective led Bentley, among many ridiculous "improvements" of Milton's language, to change it to "sacred." Again, the word "recollect" is used in its etymological sense in these lines from "Paradise Lost":

> "But he, his wonted pride
> Soon recollecting, with high words," etc.

So Milton uses the word "astonished" in its etymological sense of "thunderstruck," *attonitus*, as when he makes Satan say that his associates

> "Lie thus *astonished* on the oblivious pool."

Holland, in his translation of Livy, speaks of a knave

who threw some heavy stones upon a certain king, "whereof the one smote the king upon his head, the other astonished his shoulder."

Shakespeare, also, not unfrequently uses words in their classical sense. Thus when Cleopatra speaks of

"Such gifts as we greet *modern* friends withal,"

"modern" is used in the sense of "modal" (from *modus*, a fashion or manner); a modern friend, compared with a true friend, being what the fashion of a thing is, compared with the substance. So,—as De Quincey, to whom we owe this explanation, has shown,—when in the famous picture of life, "All the World's a Stage," the justice is described as

"Full of wise saws and modern instances,"

the meaning is not "full of wise sayings and modern illustrations," but full of proverbial maxims of conduct and of trivial arguments; *i.e.*, of petty distinctions that never touch the point at issue. "Instances" is from *instantia*, which the monkish and scholastic writers always used in the sense of an argument. When in "Julius Cæsar" we read,—

"And come down
With fearful bravery, thinking by this face
To fasten in our thoughts that they have courage,"

we must not attach to "bravery" its modern sense; and the same remark applies to the word "extravagant" in the following passage from "Hamlet":

"Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine," etc.

"Courage" is "good heart." "Anecdote,"—from the Greek ἀν (not), ἐκ (out), and δότα (given),—meant once a

fact not given out or published; now it means a short, amusing story. Procopius, a Greek historian in the reign of Justinian, is said to have coined the word. Not daring, for fear of torture and death, to speak of some living persons as they deserved, he wrote a work which he called "Anecdotes," or a "Secret History." The instant an anecdote is published, it belies its title; it is no longer an anecdote. "Allowance" formerly was used to denote praise or approval; as when Shakespeare says in "Troilus and Cressida,"

> "A stirring dwarf we do *allowance* give
> Before a sleeping giant."

"To prevent," which now means to hinder or obstruct, signified, in its Latin etymology, to anticipate, to get the start of, and is thus used in the Old Testament. "Girl" once designated a young person of either sex. "Widow" was applied to men as well as women. "Sagacious" once meant quick-smelling, as in the line

> "The hound sagacious of the tainted prey."

"Rascal," according to Verstegan, primarily meant an "il-favoured, lean, and worthelesse deer." Thus Shakespeare:

> "Horns! the noblest deer hath them as huge as the rascal."

Afterward it denoted the common people, the *plebs* as distinguished from the *populus*. A "naturalist" was once a person who rejected revealed truth, and believed only in natural religion. He is now an investigator of nature and her laws, and often a believer in Christianity. "Blackguards" were formerly the scullions, turnspits, and other meaner retainers in a great household, who, when a change was made from one residence to another, accompanied and took

care of the pots, pans, and other kitchen utensils, by which they were smutted. Webster, in his play of "The White Devil," speaks of "a lousy knave, that within these twenty years rode with the 'black guard' in the Duke's carriage, amongst spits and dripping-pans." "Artillery," which to-day means the heavy ordnance of modern warfare, was two or three centuries ago applied to any engines for throwing missiles, even to the bow and arrow. "Punctual," which now denotes exactness in keeping engagements, formerly applied to space as well as to time. Sir Thomas Browne speaks of "a 'punctual' truth"; and we read in other writers of "a 'punctual' relation," or "description," meaning a particular or circumstantial relation or description.

"Bombast," now swelling talk, inflated diction without substance, was originally cotton padding. It is derived from the Low Latin, *bombax*, cotton. "Chemist" once meant the same as alchemist. "Polite" originally meant polished. Cudworth speaks of "polite bodies, as looking-glasses." "Tidy," which now means neat, well arranged, is derived from the old English word "tide," meaning time, as in eventide. "Tidy" (German, *zeitig*) is timely, seasonable. As things in right time are apt to be in the right place, the transition in the meaning of the word is a natural one. "Caitiff" formerly meant captive, being derived from *captivus* through the Norman-French. The change of signification points to the tendency of slavery utterly to debase the character,—to transform the man into a cowardly miscreant. In like manner "miscreant," once simply a misbeliever, and applied to the most virtuous as well as to the vilest, points to the deep-felt conviction that a wrong belief leads to wrong living. Thus Gibbon: "The emper-

or's generosity to the 'miscreant' [Soliman] was interpreted as treason to the Christian cause." "Thought," in early English, was anxious care; *e.g.*, "Take no 'thought' for your life" (Matt. vi, 25). "Thing" primarily meant discourse, then solemn discussion, council, court of justice, cause, matter or subject of discourse. The "husting" was originally the house-thing, or domestic court.

"Coquets" were once male as well as female. "Usury," which now means taking illegal or excessive interest, denoted, at first, the taking of any interest, however small. A "tobacconist" was formerly a smoker, not a seller, of tobacco. "Corpse," now a body from which the breath of life has departed, once denoted the body of the living also; as in Surrey,

"A valiant *corpse*, where force and beauty met."

We have already spoken of the striking change which the word "incomprehensible" has undergone within the last three centuries.

"Wit," now used in a more limited sense, at first signified the mental powers collectively; *e.g.*, "Will puts in practice what the wit deviseth." Later it came to denote quickness of apprehension, beauty or elegance in composition, and Pope defined it as

"Nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."

Another meaning was a man of talents or genius. The word "parts," a hundred years ago, was used to denote genius or talents. Horace Walpole, in one of his letters, says of Goldsmith that "he was an idiot, with once or twice a fit of 'parts.'" The word "loyalty" has undergone a marked change within a few centuries. Originally

it meant in English, as in French, fair dealing, fidelity to engagements; now it means, in England, fidelity to the throne, and, in the United States, to the Union or the Constitution. "Relevant," which formerly meant relieving or assisting, is now used in the sense of "relative" or "relating" to, with which, from a similarity of sound, though without the least etymological connection, it appears to have been confounded. The word "exorbitant" once meant deviating from a track or orbit; it is now used exclusively in the sense of excessive.

The word "coincide" was primarily a mathematical term. If one mathematical point be superposed upon another, or one straight line upon another between the same two points, the two points in the first case and the two lines in the latter are said to coincide. The word was soon applied figuratively to identity of opinion, but, according to Prof. Marsh, was not fully popularized, at least in America, till 1826. On the Fourth of July in that year, the semi-centennial jubilee of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, the author of that manifesto, and John Adams, its principal champion on the floor of Congress, both also Ex-Presidents, died; and this fact was noticed all over the world, and especially in the United States, as a remarkable "coincidence." The death of Ex-President Monroe, also, on the Fourth of July five years after, gave increased currency to the word. Our late civil war has led to some striking mutations in the meaning of words. "Contraband," from its general signification of any article whose importation or exportation is prohibited by law, became limited to a fugitive slave within the United States' military lines. "Secede" and "secession,"

"confederate" and "confederacy," have also acquired new special meanings.

DEGRADATION OF WORDS.

Another striking characteristic of words is their tendency to contract in form and degenerate in meaning. Sometimes they are ennobled and purified in signification; but more frequently they deteriorate, and from an honorable fall into a dishonorable meaning. I will first note a few examples of the former:—"Humility," with the Greeks and Romans, meant meanness of spirit; "Paradise," in oriental tongues, meant only a royal park; "regeneration" was spoken by the Greeks only of the earth in the springtime, and of the recollection of forgotten knowledge; "sacrament" and "mystery" are words "fetched from the very dregs of paganism" to set forth the great truths of our redemption. On the other hand, "thief" (Anglo-Saxon, *theow*) formerly signified only one of the servile classes; and "villain" or "villein," meant peasant,—the serf who, under the feudal system, was *adscriptus glebæ*. The scorn of the landholders, the half-barbarous aristocracy, for these persons, led them to ascribe to them the most hateful qualities, some of which their degrading situation doubtless tended to foster. Thus the word "villein" became gradually associated with ideas of crime and guilt, till at length it became a synonym for knaves of every class in society. A "menial" was one of the many; "insolent" meant unusual; "silly," blessed,—the infant Jesus being termed by an old English poet "that harmless 'silly' babe"; "officious" signified ready to do kindly offices. "Demure" was used once in a good sense, with-

out the insinuation which is now almost latent in it, that the external shows of modesty and sobriety rest on no corresponding realities. "Facetious," which now has the sense of buffoonish, originally meant urbane. "Idiot," from the Greek, originally signified only a private man, as distinguished from an office-holder. "Homely" formerly meant secret and familiar; and "brat," now a vulgar and contemptuous word, had anciently a very different signification, as in the following lines from an old hymn by Gascoigne:

> "O Israel, O household of the Lord,
> O Abraham's brats, O brood of blessed seed,
> O chosen sheep that loved the Lord indeed."

"Imp" once meant graft; Bacon speaks of "those most virtuous and goodly young imps, the Duke of Sussex and his brother." A "boor" was once only a farmer; a "scamp" a camp deserter. "Speculation" first meant the sense of sight; as in Shakespeare:

> "Thou hast no speculation in those eyes."

Next it was metaphorically transferred to mental vision, and finally denoted, without a metaphor, the reflections and theories of philosophers. From the domain of philosophy it has finally travelled downward to the offices of stock-jobbers, share-brokers, and all men who get their living by their wits, instead of by the sweat of their brows. So "craft" at first meant ability, skill, or dexterity. The origin of the term, according to Wedgewood, is seen in the notion of seizing, expressed by the Italian, *graffiare*, Welsh, *craff*, a hook, brace, holdfast. The term is then applied to seizing with the mind, as in the Latin term "apprehend," "comprehend," from *prehendere*, to seize in a material way.

"Cunning" once conveyed no idea of sinister or crooked wisdom. "The three Persons of the Trinity," says a reverent writer of the fifteenth century, "are of equal cunning." Bacon, a century later, uses the word in its present sense of fox-like wisdom; and Locke calls it "the ape of wisdom." "Vagabond" is a word whose etymology conveys no reproach. It denoted at first only a wanderer. But as men who have no homes are apt to become loose, unsteady, and reckless in their habits, the term has degenerated into its present signification.

"Paramour" meant originally only lover; a "minion" was a favorite; and "knave," the lowest and most contemptuous term we can use when insulting another, signified originally, as *knabe* still does in German, a boy. Subsequently, it meant servant; thus Paul, in Wicliffe's version of the New Testament, reverently terms himself "a 'knave' of Jesus Christ." A similar parallel to this is the word "varlet," which is the same as "valet." "Retaliate," from the Latin *re* (back) and *talis* (such), naturally means to pay back in kind, or such as we have received. But as, according to Sir Thomas More, men write their injuries in marble, the kindnesses done them in sand, the word "retaliate" is applied only to offences or indignities, and never to favors. The word "resent," to feel in return, has undergone a similar deterioration. A Frenchman would say, "*Il 'ressentit' une vive douleur*," for "He felt acute pain"; whereas we use the word only to express the sentiment of anger.

So "animosity," which etymologically means only spiritedness, is now applied to only one kind of vigor and activity, that displayed in enmity and hate. "Defalcation," from the Latin, *falx*, a sickle or scythe, is properly a cutting off

or down, a pruning or retrenchment. Thus Addison: "The tea-table is set forth with its usual bill of fare, and without any defalcation." To-day we read of a "defalcation in the revenue," or "in a treasurer's accounts," by which is meant a decrease in the amount of the revenue, or in the moneys accounted for, irrespective of the cause,—a falling off. This erroneous use of the word is probably due to a confusion of it with the expression "fall away," and with the noun "defaulter." Between the first word and either of the last two, however, there is not the slightest etymological relationship. "Chaffer," to talk much and idly, primarily meant to buy, to make a bargain, to higgle or dispute about a bargain. "Gossip" (God-akin) once meant a sponsor in baptism. "Simple" and "simplicity" have sadly degenerated in meaning. A "simple" fellow, once a man *sine plica* (without fold, free from duplicity), is now one who lacks shrewdness, and is easily cheated or duped.

There are some words which, though not used in an absolutely unfavorable sense, yet require a qualifying adjective to be understood favorably. Thus, if a man is said to be noted for his "curiosity," a prying, impertinent, not a legitimate, curiosity is supposed to be meant. So "critic" and "criticise" are commonly associated with a carping, fault-finding spirit. "Lust" has undergone a signal deterioration. In Chaucer it is used both as a noun and a verb, and signifies wish, desire, pleasure, enjoyment, without any evil connotation. "Parson" (*persona ecclesiæ*) had originally no undertone of contempt. In the eighteenth century it had become a nickname of scorn; and it was at a party of a dozen parsons that the Earl of Sandwich won his wager, that no one among them had brought

his prayer-book or forgotten his corkscrew. "Fellow" was originally a term of respect,—at least, there was in it no subaudition of contempt; now it is suggestive of worthlessness, if not of positively bad morals. Shakespeare did not mean to disparage Yorick, the jester, when he said that "he was a 'fellow' of infinite jest"; Pope, on the other hand, tells us, a century or more later, that

"Worth makes the man, and want of it the *fellow*."

"By a 'fast' man, I presume you mean a 'loose' one," said Sir Robert Inglis to one who was describing a rake. Of all the words which have degenerated from their original meaning, the most remarkable is the term "dunce," of the history of which Archbishop Trench has given a striking account in his work on "The Study of Words." In the Middle Ages certain theologians, educated in the cathedral and cloister schools founded by Charlemagne and his successors, were called Schoolmen. Though they were men of great acuteness and subtlety of intellect, their works, at the revival of learning, ceased to be popular, and it was considered a mark of intellectual progress and advance to have thrown off their yoke. Some persons, however, still clung to these Schoolmen, especially to Duns Scotus, the great teacher of the Franciscan order; and many times an adherent of the old learning would seek to strengthen his position by an appeal to its great doctor, familiarly called Duns; while his opponents would contemptuously rejoin, "Oh, you are a 'Duns-man,'" or, more briefly, "You are a 'Duns.'" As the new learning was enlisting more and more of the scholarship of the age on its side, the title became more and more a term of scorn; and thus, from that long extinct conflict between the old and the new

learning, the mediæval and the modern theology, we inherit the words "dunce" and "duncery." The lot of poor Duns, as the Archbishop observes, was certainly a hard one. That the name of "the Subtle Doctor," as he was called, one of the keenest and most subtle-witted of men,—according to Hooker, "the wittiest of the school divines,"—should become a synonym for stupidity and obstinate dulness, was a fate of which even his bitterest enemies could never have dreamed.

COMMON WORDS WITH CURIOUS DERIVATIONS.

"Bit" is that which has been bit off, and exactly corresponds to the word "morsel," used in the same sense, and derived from the Latin, *mordere*, to bite. "Bankrupt" means literally broken bench. It was the custom in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for the Lombard merchants to expose their wares for sale in the market-place on benches. When one of their number failed, all the other merchants set upon him, drove him from the market, and "broke" his "bench" to pieces. *Banco rotto*, the Italian for bench-broken, becomes *banqueroute* in French, and in English "bankrupt." To the Lombard merchants, who flocked to England in the thirteenth century, we owe also the words "bank," "debtor," "creditor," "usance" (the old word for interest), "journal," "diary," "ledger," "ditto," and "£. s. d.," which derives its origin from *Lire*, *Soldi*, and *Denari*. "Alligator" is from the Spanish *el lagarto*, the lizard, being the largest of the lizard species. "Stipulation" is from *stipulum*, a straw, which the Romans broke when they made a mutual engagement. "Dexterity" is simply righthandedness. "Mountebank" means a quack-medicine vendor,—from the Italian *montare*, to mount, and *banco*, a bench;

literally, one who mounts a bench to boast of his infallible skill in curing diseases. "Quandary" is a corruption of the French, *qu'en dirai (je)*? "what shall I say of it?"—and expresses that feeling of uncertainty which would naturally prompt such a question. "Faint" is from the French, *se feindre*, to pretend; so that originally fainting was a pretended weakness or inability. We have an example of the thing originally indicated by the word, in the French theatres, where professional fainters are employed, whose business it is to be overcome and to sink to the floor under the powerful acting of the tragedians.

"Topsy-turvy" is said to be a contraction or corruption of "top-side t'other way." "Helter-skelter" is either from *hilariter et celeriter*, "gaily and quickly," or, more probably, from *helter*, to hang, and *skelter*, order, *i.e.*, "hang order." "Hip! hip! hurrah!" is said to have been originally a war-cry adopted by the stormers of a German town, wherein a great many Jews had taken refuge. The place being sacked, the Jews were all put to the sword, amid the shouts of "*Hierosolyma est perdita!*" From the first letters of these words (h. e. p.) an exclamation was contrived. When the wine sparkles in the cup, and patriotic or other soul-thrilling sentiments are greeted with a "Hip! hip! hurrah!" it is well enough to remember the origin of a cry which reminds us of the cruelty of Christians toward God's chosen people. "Sexton" is a corruption of "sacristan," which is from *sacra*, the sacred things of a church. The sacristan's office was to take care of the vessels of the service and the vestments of the clergy. Since the Reformation, his duties in this respect have been greatly lessened, and he has dug the graves,—so that the term

now commonly means grave-digger, though it still retains somewhat of its old meaning.

"Toad-eater" is a metaphor supposed to be taken from a mountebank's boy eating toads, in order to show his master's skill in expelling poison. It is more probable, however, that the phrase is a version of the French, *avaler des couleuvres*, which means putting up with all sorts of indignities without showing resentment. The propriety of the term rests on the fact that dependent persons are often forced to do the most nauseous things to please their patrons. The same trick of pretending to eat reptiles, such as toads, is held by some etymologists to be the origin of the terms "buffoon," "buffoonery," from the Latin, *bufo*, a toad. Wedgwood derives it from the French, *bouffon*, a jester, from the Italian, *buffa*, a puff, a blast or a blurt with the mouth made at one in scorn. A puff with the mouth indicates contempt; it is emblematically *making light* of an object. In "David Copperfield" we read: "'And who minds Dick? Dick's nobody! Whoo!' He blew a slight, contemptuous breath, as if he blew himself away."

"Cant" (Gaelic, *cainnt*, speech) is properly the language spoken by thieves and beggars among themselves, when they do not wish to be understood by bystanders. Subsequently it came to mean the peculiar terms used by any other profession or community. Some etymologists derive the word from the Latin, *cantare*, to sing, and suppose it to signify the whining cry of professional beggars, though it may have obtained its beggar sense from some instinctive notion of the quasi-religious one. It has been noted that the whole class of words comprising "enchant," "incantation," etc., were primarily referable to religious ceremonies

of some kind; and as once an important part of a beggar's daily labor was invoking, or seeming to invoke, blessings on those who gave him alms, this, with the natural tendency to utter any oft-repeated phrases in a sing-song, rhythmical tone, gave to the word "cant" its present signification. In Scotland the word has a peculiar meaning. About the middle of the seventeenth century, Andrew and Alexander Cant, of Edinburgh, maintained that all refusers of the covenant ought to be excommunicated, and that all excommunicated might lawfully be killed; and in their grace after meat they "praid for those phanaticques and seditious ministers" who had been arrested and imprisoned, that the Lord would pity and deliver them. From these two Cants, Andrew and Alexander, it is said, all seditious praying and preaching in Scotland is called "Canting."

The tendency to regard money as the source of true happiness is strikingly illustrated in the word "wealth," which is connected with "weal," just as in Latin *beatus* meant both blessed and rich, and ὄλβιος the same in Greek. "Property" and "propriety" come from the same French word, *propriété;* so that the Frenchman in New York was not far out of the way, when in the panic of 1857 he said he "should lose all his *propriety.*" The term "blue-stocking," applied to literary ladies, has a curious origin. Originally, in England in 1760, it was conferred on a society of literary persons of both sexes. The society derived its name from the blue worsted stockings always worn by Benjamin Stillingfleet, a distinguished writer, who was one of the most active promoters of this association. This term was subsequently conferred on literary ladies, from the fact that the accomplished and fascinating Mrs.

Jerningham wore blue stockings at the social and literary entertainments given by Lady Montague. "Woman" is the *wif* or *web*-man, who stays at home to spin, as distinguished from the *weap*-man, who goes abroad to use the weapon of war. The term "man" is, of course, generic, including both male and female. "Lady" primarily signifies bread keeper. It is derived from the Anglo-Saxon, *hlæfdige*, *i.e.*, she who looks after the loaf; or else is a corruption of *hlâfweardige*, from *hlâf*, bread, loaf, and *weardian*, to keep, look after. "Waist" is the same as waste; that part of the figure which wastes,—that is, diminishes.

"Canard" has a very curious origin. M. Quêtelet, a French writer, in the "Annuaire de l'Académie Française," attributes the first application of this term to Norbert Cornelïssen, who, to give a sly hit at the ridiculous pieces of intelligence in the public journals, stated that an interesting experiment had just been made calculated to prove the voracity of ducks. Twenty were placed together; and one of them having been killed and cut up into the smallest possible pieces, feathers and all, was thrown to the other nineteen, and most gluttonously gobbled up. Another was then taken from the nineteen, and, being chopped small like its predecessor, was served up to the eighteen, and at once devoured like the other; and so on to the last, who thus was placed in the position of having eaten his nineteen companions. This story, most pleasantly narrated, ran the round of all the journals of Europe. It then became almost forgotten for about a score of years, when it went back from America with amplifications; but the word remained in its novel signification.

"Abominable" was once supposed to have been derived from the Latin words *ab*, from, and *homo*, a man, meaning repugnant to humanity. It really comes from *abominor*, which again is from *ab* and *omen;* and it conveys the idea of what is in a religious sense profane and detestable, —in short, of evil omen. Milton always applies it to devilish, profane, or idolatrous objects. "Poltroon" is *pollice truncus*, *i.e.*, with the thumb cut off,—*pollex*, Latin, meaning thumb, and *truncus*, maimed or mutilated. When the Roman empire was about falling in pieces, the valor of the citizens had so degenerated, that, to escape fighting, many cut off their right thumbs, thus disabling themselves from using the pike. "Farce" is derived from *farcire*, a Latin word meaning to stuff, as with flour, herbs, and other ingredients in cooking. A farce is a comedy with little plot, stuffed with ludicrous incidents and expressions. "Racy" is from "race," meaning family, breed, and signifies having the characteristic flavor of origin, savoring of the source.

"Trivial" may be from *trivium*, in the sense of *tres viæ*, a place where three roads meet, and thus indicate that which is commonplace, or of daily occurence. But it is more probably from *trivium*, in the sense in which the word was used in the Middle Ages, when it meant the course of three arts, grammar, logic, and rhetoric, which formed the common curriculum of the universities, as distinguished from the *quadrivium*, which embraced four more, namely, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. Trivial things in this sense may mean things that occur ordinarily, as distinguished from higher or more abstruse things. The word "quiz" has a remarkable origin, unless the etymologists who give its derivation are themselves

quizzing their readers. It is said that many years ago, when one Daly was patentee of the Irish theatres, he spent the evening of a Saturday in company with many of the wits and men of fashion of the day. Gambling was introduced, when the manager staked a large sum that he would have spoken, all through the principal streets of Dublin, by a certain hour next day, Sunday, a word having no meaning, and being derived from no known language. Wagers were laid, and stakes deposited. Daly repaired to the theatre, and dispatched all the servants and supernumeraries with the word "Quiz," which they chalked on every door and every shop window in town. Shops being all shut next day, everybody going to and coming from the different places of worship saw the word, and everybody repeated it, so that "Quiz" was heard all through Dublin; the circumstance of so strange a word being on every door and window caused much surprise, and ever since, should a strange story be attempted to be passed current, it draws forth the expression "You are 'quizzing' me." Some person who has a just aversion to practical jokes, wittily defines a "quizzer" as "one who believes me to be a fool because I will not believe him to be a liar."

"Huguenot" is a word whose origin is still a *vexata quæstio* of etymology. Of the many derivations given, some of which are ridiculously fanciful, *Eignots*, which Voltaire and others give from the German, *Eidgenossen*, confederates, is the one generally received. A plausible derivation is from *Huguenot*, a small piece of money, which, in the time of Hugo Capet, was worth less than a denier. At the time of Amboisi's conspiracy, some of the petitioners fled through fear; whereupon some of the

countrymen said they were poor fellows, not worth a Huguenot,—whence the nickname in question. "Pensive" is a picturesque word, from *pensare*, the frequentative of *pendere*, to weigh. The French have *pensée*, a thought, the result of mental weighing. A pensive figure is that in which a person appears to be holding an invisible balance of reflection. "Bumper" is a corruption of *le bon père*, meaning "the Holy Father," or Pope, who was once the great toast of every feast. As this was commonly the first toast, it was considered that the glasses would be desecrated by being again used.

"Nice" is derived by some etymologists from the Anglo-Saxon, *hnesc*, soft, effeminate; but there is good reason for believing that it is from the Latin, *nescius*, ignorant, "Wise, and nothing nice," says Chaucer; that is, no wise ignorant. If so, it is a curious instance of the extraordinary changes of meaning which words undergo, that "nice" should come to signify accurate or fastidious, which implies knowledge and taste rather than ignorance. The explanation is, that the diffidence of ignorance resembles the fastidious slowness of discernment. "Gibberish" is from a famous sage, Giber, an Arab, who sought for the philosopher's stone, and used, perhaps, senseless incantations. "Alert" is a picturesque word from the Italian, *all' erte*,—on the mound or rampart. The "alert" man is one who is wide-awake and watchful, like the warder on the watch-tower, or the sentinel upon the rampart. "By-laws" are not, etymologically, laws of inferior importance, but the laws of "byes" or towns, as distinguished from the general laws of a kingdom. "By" is Danish for town

or village; as "Whitby," White Town, "Derby," Deer Town, etc,

A writer in "Notes and Queries" suggests that the word "snobs" may be of classical origin, derived from *sine obola*, without a penny. It is not probable, however, that it was meant as a sneer at poverty only. A more ingenious suggestion is that, as the higher classes were called "nobs,"—*i.e.*, *nobilitas*, the nobility,—the "s-nobs" were those *sine nobilitate*, without any blue blood in their veins, or pure aristocratic breeding. "Humbug" is an expressive word, about the origin of which etymologists are disagreed. An ingenious explanation, not given in the dictionaries, is, that it is derived from "Hume of the Bog," a Scotch laird, so called from his estate, who lived during the reign of William and Anne. He was celebrated in Edinburgh circles for his marvellous stories, which, in the exhausting draughts they made on his hearer's credulity, out-Munchausened Munchausen. Hence, any tough story was called "a regular Hume of the Bog," or, by contraction, "Humbug." Another etymology of "humbug" is a piece of Hamburg news; *i.e.*, a Stock Exchange canard. Webster derives the word from "hum," to impose on, deceive, and "bug" a frightful object, a bugbear. Wedgwood thinks it may come from the union of "hum" and "buzz," signifying sound without sense. He cites a catch, set by Dr. Arne in "Notes and Queries":

"'Buzz,' quoth the blue fly,
'Hum,' quoth the bee,
'Buzz' and 'hum' they cry,
And so do we."

"Imbecile" is from the Latin, *in* and *bacillum*, a walking stick; one who through infirmity leans for support

upon a stick. "Petrels" are little Peters, because, like the apostles, they can walk on the water. "Hocus pocus" is a corruption of *Hoc est corpus*, "this is the body," words once used in necromancy or jugglery. "Chagrin" is primarily a hard, granulated leather, which chafes the limbs; hence, secondarily, irritation or vexation. "Canon" is from a Greek word meaning "cane"; first a hollow rule or a cane used as a measure, then a law or rule. The word is identical with "cannon," so called from its hollow, tube-like form. Hence it has been wittily said that the world in the Middle Ages was governed first by canons, and then by cannons,—first, by Saint Peter, and then by saltpetre.

"Booby" primarily denotes a person who gapes and stares about, wondering at everything. From the syllable "ba," representing the opening of the mouth, are formed the French words *baier*, *béer*, to gape, and thence in the patois of the Hainault, *baia*, the mouth, and figuratively one who stands staring with open mouth, *boubié*. Webster thinks the word is derived from the French, *boubie*, a water-fowl. "Pet," a darling, is from the French. *petit*, which comes from the Latin, *petitus*, sought after. "My pet" means literally "my sought after or desired one." "Petty" is also from the French, *petit*, little. "Assassin" is derived from the Persian, *hashish*, an intoxicating opiate. "The Assassins" were a tribe of fanatics, who lived in the mountains of Lebanon, and executed with terror and subtlety every order entrusted to them by their chief, the "Old Man of the Mountain." They made a jest of torture when seized, and were the terror alike of Turk and Christian. They resembled the Thugs of India. "Blunderbuss" (properly thunder-buss) is from the German

büchse, applied to a rifle, a box; hence "arquebuss" and "Brown Bess." "Bosh" is derived, according to some etymologists, from a Turkish word meaning "empty,"—according to others, from the German, *bosse*, a joke or trifle. Mr. Blackley, in his "Word-Gossip," says it is the pure gypsy word for "fiddle," which suggests the semi-sanctioned "fiddle-de-dee!" "Person" primarily meant an actor. The Roman theatres, which could hold thirty to forty thousand spectators, were so large that the actors wore masks containing a contrivance to render the voice louder. Such a mask was called *persona* (*per sonare*, to sound through), because the voice sounded through it. By a common figure of speech, the word meaning "mask" (*persona*) was afterward applied to its wearer; so *persona* came to signify "actor." But as all men are actors, playing each his part on the stage of life, the word "person" came afterward to signify a man or woman. "Parson" the "chief person" of a parish, is another form of the same word. "Curmudgeon" is probably from "corn-merchant," one who tries to enrich himself by hoarding grain and withholding it from others; or it may be from the French, *cœur*, the heart, and *méchant*, wicked. "Haberdasher" is from the German, *Habt ihr das hier? i.e.*, Have you this here? "Hoax" is from the Anglo-Saxon, *husc*, mockery or contempt; or, perhaps it is from "hocuspocus," which was at one time used to ridicule the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

"Right" is from the Latin *rectus*, ruled, proceeding in a straight line; "wrong" is the perfect participle of "wring," that which has been "wrung" or wrested from the right; just as in French *tort* is from *torqueo*, that which is twisted.

"Humble-pie" is properly "umble-pie." The umbles were the entrails or coarser parts of the deer, the perquisite of the keeper or huntsman. "Pantaloon" is from the Italian, *piante leone* (*panta-leone*, *pantaloon*), "the Planter of the Lion"; *i.e.*, the Standard-Bearer of Venice. The Lion of St. Mark was the standard of Venice. "Pantaloon" was a masked character in the Italian comedy, the butt of the play, who wore breeches and stockings that were all of one piece. The Spanish language has *pañalon*, a slovenly fellow whose shirt hangs out of his breeches. "Cheat" is from the Latin, *cadere*, to fall. The word "escheats" first denoted lands that "fell" to the crown by forfeiture. The "escheatours," who certified these to the Exchequer, practised so much fraud, that, by a natural transition, the "escheatour" passed into "cheater," and "escheat" into "cheat."

"Salary" is from the Latin, *sal*, salt, which in the reign of the Emperor Augustus comprised the provisions, as well as the pay, of the Roman military officers. From "salary" came, probably, the expression, "He is not worth his 'salt,'" that is, his pay or wages. "Kidnap" is from the German *kind*, or Provincial English, *kid*, meaning "child," and *nap* or *nab*, "to steal,"—to steal children. "Hawk," in Anglo-Saxon, *hafoc*, points to the havoc which that bird makes among the smaller ones; as "raven" expresses the greedy or "ravenous" disposition of the bird so named. "Owl" is said to be the past participle of "to yell" (as in Latin *ulula*, the screech-owl, is from *ululare*), and differs from "howl" only in its spelling. "Solecism" is from *Soli*, a town of Cilicia, the people of which corrupted the pure Greek. "Squirrel" is from two Greek words, *σκία*, a shade, and *οὐρά*, a tail. "Sycophant" is primarily a "fig-shower";

one who informed the public officers of Attica that the law against the exportation of figs had been violated. Hence the word came to mean a common informer, a mean parasite. "Parasite," from the Greek *παρά*, beside, and *σῖτος*, food, means literally one who eats at the table of another,—a privilege which is apt to be paid for by obsequiousness and flattery.

"Sarcasm," from the Greek, *σάρξ*, flesh, and *κάζω*, I tear, is literally a tearing of the flesh. "Tribulation" is from the Latin *tribulum*, a kind of sledge or heavy roller, which did the work of the English flail, by hard grinding and wearing, instead of by repeated light strokes. Troubles, afflictions and sorrows being the divinely appointed means for separating the chaff from the wheat of men's natures,—the light and trivial from the solid and valuable,—the early Christians, by a rustic but familiar metaphor, called these sorrows and trials "tribulations," threshings of the inner spiritual man, by which only could he be fitted for the heavenly garner. As Wither beautifully sings:

> "Till the mill the grains in pieces tear,
> The richness of the flour will scarce appear;
> So till men's persons great afflictions touch,
> If worth be found, their worth is not much;
> Because, like wheat in straw, they have not yet
> That value, which in threshing they may get."

"Tabby," a familiar name of cats, is the French *tabis*, which comes from the Persian *retabi*, a rich watered silk, and denotes the wavy bars upon their coats. "Schooner" has a curious derivation. In 1713 Captain Andrew Robinson launched the first vessel of this kind, with gaffs instead of the lateen yards until then in use, and the luff of the sail bent to hoops on the mast. As she slipped down the ways a bystander exclaimed, "Oh, how she 'scoons'!"—where-

upon the builder, catching at the word, replied, "A 'scooner' let her be!" Originally the word was spelled without the *h*. "Supercilious," from *supercilium*, the eyebrow, is literally knitting the eyebrows in pride. "Slave" chronicles the contest between the Teutonic and Sclavonic or Slavonic races. When a German captured a Russian or Bohemian, he would call him a "sclave" or "slave," whereby the word became associated with the idea of servitude. In Oriental France, in the eighth century, princes and bishops were rich in these captives.

"Servant" is from *servus*, which the Justinian code derives from *servare*, to preserve,— because the victor preserved his captives alive, instead of killing them.

"Scrupulous" is from the Latin, *scrupulus*, a small, sharp stone, such as might get into a Roman traveller's open shoe, and distress him, whence the further meaning of doubts, or a source of doubt and hesitation. Afterward the word came to express a measure of weight, the twenty-fourth part of an ounce; and hence to be scrupulous is to pay minute, nice, and exact attention to matters often in themselves of small weight. "Plagiarism" is literally "man-stealing." As books are one's mental offspring, the word came naturally to mean, first, the stealing of a book or manuscript which the thief published as his own; secondly, quoting from another man's writings without acknowledgment. "Parlor," from *parler*, to speak, is, therefore, the "talking room," as "boudoir," from *bouder*, to pout, is literally the "pouting-room." "Egregious" is from the Latin *ex*, from, and *grege*, flock or herd. An "egregious" lie is one distinguished from the common herd of lies, such as one meets with in every patent-medicine

advertisement and political newspaper. "Negotiate" is from *negotior*, compounded of *ne ego otior*, I am not idle.

The origin of the word "caucus" has long been a vexed question with etymologists. Till recently it was supposed by many to be a corruption of "caulkers," being derived from an association of these men in Boston, who met to organize resistance to England just before the revolutionary war. Dr. J. Hammond Trumbull, of Hartford, Connecticut, has suggested a new and ingenious derivation of the term, which is more satisfactory, and probably correct. Strachey, in his "Historie of Travaile into Virginia," 1610–12 (printed by the Hakluyt Society, 1849), says that the Chechahamanias, a free people, acknowledging the supremacy of Powhatan, were governed, not by a *weroance*, commander, sent by Powhatan, but by their priests, with the assistance of their elders; and this board was called *cawcawwas*. Captain John Smith writes *cockerouse* for *cawcawwas*, in the sense of "captain"; but the English generally understood it in the sense of "counsellor," and adopted it from the Indians, as Beverley states that it designates "one that has the honor to be of the king's or queen's council," a provincial councillor, just as northern politicians now use the word *sachem*, and formerly used *mugwomp*. The verb from which *cawcawwas*, or *cockerouse* comes, means primarily "to talk to,"—hence to "harangue," "advise," "encourage," and is found in all Algonquin dialects, as Abnaki *kakesoo*, to incite, and Chippeway *gaganso* (*n* nasal), to exhort, urge, counsel. *Cawcawwas*, representing the adjective form of this verb, is "one who advises, promotes,"—a caucuser. "Manumit" is from *manus*, hand, and *mittere*, to dismiss,—to dismiss a slave with a slap of the hand, on setting him free.

"Hypocrite" comes from a Greek word signifying one who feigns or plays a part on the stage. "Kennel," a dog house, is from the Italian, *canile*, and this from the Latin, *canis*, a dog. "Kennel," in the sense of gutter, with its kindred words, "can," "cane," and "channel," is derived from *canna*, a cane, which is like a tube.

"Apple-pie order" is a popular phrase of which few persons know the meaning. Does it signify in order, or in disorder? A writer in the "North British Review" favors the latter interpretation. He thinks it has nothing to do with "apple" or "pie," in the common sense of those words. He believes that it is a typographical term, and that it was originally "Chapel pie." A printing house was, and is to this day, called a chapel,—perhaps from the Chapel at Westminster Abbey, in which Caxton's earliest works are said to have been printed; and "pie" is type after it is "distributed" or broken up, and before it has been re-sorted. "'Pie' in this sense came from the confused and *perplexing rules of the 'Pie,' that is, the order for finding the lessons, in Catholic times*, which those who have read, or care to read, the Preface to the 'Book of Common Prayer,' will find there expressed and denounced. Here is the passage: 'Moreover the number and hardness of the rules called the Pie, and the manifold changings of the service, was the cause that to turn the book only was so hard and intricate a matter, that many times there was more business to find out what should be read than to read it when it was found out.' To leave your type in 'pie' is to leave it unsorted and in confusion, and 'apple-pie order,' which we take to be 'chapel-pie order,' is to leave anything in a thorough mess. Those who like to take the other side, and assert that 'apple-pie order'

means in perfect order, may still find their derivation in 'chapel-pie'; for the ordering and sorting of the 'pie' or type is enforced in every 'chapel' or printing-house by severe fines, and so 'chapel-pie order' would be such order of the type as the best friends of the chapel would wish to see." "The bitter end," a phrase often heard during the late civil war, has a remarkable etymology. A ship's cable has always two ends. One end is fastened to the anchor and the other to the "bits," or "bitts," a frame of two strong pieces of timber fixed perpendicularly in the fore part of the ship, for the express purpose of holding the cables. Hence the "bitter," or "bitter end," is the end fastened to the bitts; and when the cable is out to the "bitter end," it is all out; the extremity has come.

Few persons who utter the word "stranger," suspect that it has its root in the single vowel *e*, the Latin preposition for "from," which it no more resembles than a bird resembles an egg. The links in the chain are,— *e*, *ex*, *extra*, *extraneus*, *étranger*, *stranger*. When a boy answers a lady, "Yes'm," he does not dream that his "m" is a fragment of the five syllables, *mea domina* ("madonna," "madame," "madam," "ma'am" "'m"). The French word *même* is a striking illustration of what philologists call "phonetic change," which sometimes "eats away the whole body of a word, and leaves nothing behind but decayed fragments." Who would believe that *même* contains the Latin *semetipsissimus?* The words "thrall" and "thraldom" have an interesting history. They come to us from a period when it was customary to "thrill" (or drill) the ear of a slave in token of servitude; and hence the significance of Sir Thomas Browne's remark, "Bow not to the omnipotency of gold, nor

'bore' thy ear to its servitude." The expression "'signing' one's name" takes us back to an age when most persons made their mark or "sign." We must not suppose that this practice was then, as now, a proof of the ignorance of the signer. Among the Saxons, not only illiterate persons made this sign, but, as an attestation of the good faith of the person signing, the mark of the cross was required to be attached to the name of those who could write. From its holy association, it was the symbol of an oath; and hence the expression "God save the mark!" which so long puzzled the commentators of Shakespeare, is now understood to be a form of ejaculation resembling an oath. It is said that Charlemagne, being unable to write, was compelled to dip the forefinger of his glove in ink, and smear it over the parchment when it was necessary that the imperial sign-manual should be fixed to an edict. "Window" is a corruption of "wind-door,"—door to let in the wind.

The word "handkerchief" is curiously fashioned. "Kerchief," the first form of the word, is from the French *couvrechef*, "a head-covering." If to "kerchief" we prefix "hand," we have a "hand-head-covering," or a covering for the head held in the hand, which is palpably absurd; but when we qualify this word by "neck" or "pocket," we reach the climax beyond which confusion can no farther go. How a covering for the "head" is to be held in the "hand," and yet carried in the "pocket," it requires a more than ordinarily vivid imagination to conceive. "Constable" is derived from *comes stabuli*, or "Count of the stable," who formerly had charge of the king's horses. "Bib" is from *bibere*, to drink, the tucker being used to save the child's clothes from whatever may be spilt when it is bibbing.

"Dollar" is the German *thaler*, which is an abbreviation of *Joachemsthaler*, the valley where it was coined.

"Host," an army, or a multitude, is from *hostis*; "host," an entertainer, is from *hospes*; "host," a sacrifice, is from *hostia*. The word "rostrum" is from the Latin *rostra*, the beak of a ship. After the submission of the Latins, 334 B.C., the vessels of Antium having been burnt, their beaks were made to adorn the tribune in the Forum. From that time the *rostra* became the indispensable decoration of the Forum, and hence the name "rostrum" to denote a platform for orators. "Verdict" is from *veredictum*, truly said. "Palliate" is from *pallium*, a cloak. "Carat" is from the Arabic *kaura*, a bean, the standard weight for diamonds. "Salmon" is from *saliendo*, which points to the "leaps" it makes. A "cur," from the Latin *curtus*, is a curtailed dog, whose tail has been cut off for straying in the woods; a "terrier" is from *terrarius*, an earth dog; a "spaniel" is a Spanish dog; a "mongrel" is a dog of mingled breed; and the mastiff guards the *maison*, or house. A horse is called a "pony" when puny; a "hack" from "hackney;" and the lady's horse was called a "palfrey," because it was led *par le frein*, or by the rein.

A "palace" is so called from *Collis Palatinus*, one of the seven hills of Rome, which was itself called Palatinus, from *Pales*, a pastoral deity. On this hill stood the "Golden House" of Nero, which was called the *Palatium*, and became the type of the palaces of all the kings and emperors of Europe. The word "court" had its origin in the same locality and in the same distant age. It was on the hills of Latium that *cohors* or *cors* was first used in the sense of a "hurdle," an "enclosure," a "cattle yard." The

cohortes, or divisions of the Roman army, were thus named, so many soldiers forming a pen or a court. *Cors*, *cortis*, became in mediæval Latin *curtis*, and was used to denote a farm, or a castle built by a Roman settler in the provinces, and finally a royal residence, or palace. That a word originally meaning "cow-pen," or "cattle-yard," should assume the meaning of "palace," and give rise to such derivatives as "courteous," "courtesy," and "to court," that is, to pay attentions, or to propose marriage, is a striking example of the strange transformations which words undergo in the course of ages. The "Court of the Star Chamber," so odious in English history, derived its name from the ceiling of the room where it sat, which was dotted with stars. "Pontiff" has an almost equally humble origin. It is from the *Pons Sublicius*, which Ancus Marcus placed on wooden joists, and which was rebuilt by the censor Æmilius Lepidus in the reign of the second of the Cæsars,— the bridge which Horatius Cocles defended, and whose construction, preservation, and maintenance were confided to the college of priests,— that the word "pontiff" is derived. The word "exchequer" comes, according to Blackstone, from the "checked" cloth that covered the table behind which the money-changers sat. "Suffrage" is from *suffragium*, a broken piece or potsherd, used by the ancients in voting in their assemblies. "Easter" is from the Anglo-Saxon, *Eastre* (German, *Ostará*), a heathen goddess whose feast was celebrated in the spring. Remains of the old pagan worship have survived in Easter eggs, yule logs, and, on the Continent of Europe, Whitsun fires.

"Mystery," something secret or unknown, comes from *mu*, the imitation of closing the lips; but "mystery," in the Mystery Plays, such as continue to be per-

formed at Ammergau, in Bavaria, is a corruption of *ministerium;* it meant a religious ministry, or service, had nothing to do with mystery, and should be spelled with an *i*, and not with a *y*. "Puny" is from the French *puis-né*, "since born," hence, by metaphor, sickly, inferior, diminutive. From the same source is derived "puisne" (that is, younger, or inferior) judge. The phrase "True Blue," applied to the Presbyterians, is said by Dean Stanley to be owing to the distinct dress of the Scotch Presbyterian clergy, which at one time was a blue gown and a broad blue bonnet. The Episcopal clergy either were no distinctive dress in public services, or wore a black gown. The Rev. Dr. Murray, however, in an address before the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, gave a different explanation of the phrase: "A Scotchman once told me that when we were persecuted as a denomination, the minister was wont to go to the mountains, and when there was to be a communion a blue flag was held up as a signal or notice, and also as an invitation to attend, and some regard this as the origin of the term; but on a visit to Pompeii, a few years ago, I spent some time in inspecting the splendid frescoes of variegated hues. I found all colors had faded except the blue, and that was as bright as when first put on, though nearly two thousand years previously. The 'true blue' never gives out,—never changes. So, when we say of a man 'he is true blue,' it is equivalent to saying he is firm in and true to his principles." "France" owes its name to the Franks, who conquered her native Celts. The word *Franc* comes, according to a German philologist, either from the Teutonic *franhô*, "bold," "frank," or from *franca*, a sharp, double-edged battle-axe, which the Franks hurled with great dex-

terity in attacking their enemies. From *Franc* are derived our words "franchise" and "enfranchisement."

One of the most interesting classes of common words with curious derivations is that of the names of things or acts which were once names of persons. Language teems in this way with honors to the great and good men who have been benefactors of their race; and it also avenges the wrongs of humanity by impaling the very names of the wrong-doers in a perpetual crucifixion. Many words of this class betray their origin at once. It is easy to recognize Tantalus in "to tantalize," Epicurus in "epicure," Mesmer in "mesmerism," Gordius in the "gordian" knot which Alexander cut, Galvani in "galvanism," Volta in the "voltaic" pile, Daguerre in "daguerreotype," and McAdam and Burke in "to macadamize" and "to burke." But when we read or hear of a work on "algebra," or of a person who has uttered "gibberish," we get no hint, at first, of Giber or Geber, the famous Arabian sage, who sought for the philosopher's stone, and used, perhaps, senseless incantations. "Artesian," applied to a well, does not inform us that such a well was first cut through the chalk basin of the province of Artois. We speak of a "dun" without suspecting that the word came from the name of a stern bailiff in the time of Henry VII, one Dun, who was eminently successful in collecting debts. We hear of a "maudlin" speech without thinking of Mary Magdalen; of a "lazaretto," without being reminded of Lazarus; of "simony" without a suggestion of Simon Magus; and of "silhouettes," without a suspicion that it was the unpopular French minister of finance, M. de Silhouette, whose persistent economy doomed his name to be affixed to the slight and cheap outline por-

traits thus named. "Martinet" does not recall the rigid disciplinarian in the army of Louis XIV, nor does a "tram-road" point very plainly to Outram, the inventor. In "saunterer" we do not readily detect *La Sainte Terre*, "the Holy Land," the pilgrims to which took their own time to get there; nor would a "pander" ever remind us of the Trojan general Pandarus, or "tawdry" of the fair of St. Etheldreda, or St. Awdry, where gaudy finery was sold. "Music," "museum," and "mosaic," do not inevitably suggest the Muses, nor does a "pasquinade" tell us about the statue of an ancient gladiator which was exhumed at Rome, in the peculiar physiognomy of which the wits of that city detected a resemblance to Pasquino, a snappish cobbler, who lived near by, and on the pedestal of which it became a practice to post lampoons. Few men think of Jaque, of Beauvais, as they put on "jackets"; of Blacket, who first manufactured the article, when they lie under "blankets"; or of Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian priest, when they "hermetically" seal a bottle or fruit can. Excepting the readers of Pascal, it is probable that not many Frenchmen detect in the word *escobarder*, "to equivocate," the name of the great casuist of the Jesuits, Escobar, whose subtle devices for the evasion of the moral law have been immortalized in the "Provincial Letters."

Vulcan is still at his forge in "volcanoes," and has even descended so low as to "vulcanize" rubber; and though "Great Pan is dead," he comes to life again in every "panic." A "sandwich" calls to mind Lord Sandwich, the inveterate gamester, who begrudged the time necessary for a meal; and the "spencer" recalls Lord Spencer, who in hunting lost one skirt of his coat, and tore off the other,—which led some inventive genius to make half-

coats, and call them "spencers." Of the two noble lords it has been said that

> "The one invented half a coat,
> The other half a dinner."

Epic and dramatic poetry, and fiction generally, have added much to the force and suggestiveness of speech. What apt and expressive terms are "utopian"* (from the name given by Sir Thomas More to his imaginary island), and "quixotic"! With what other words could we supply the place of Dean Swift's "liliputian" and "brobdingnagian," Kenny's "Jeremy Diddler," or Dickens's "pickwickian" and "Circumlocution Office"? What convenient terms are "thrasonical," from Thraso, the braggart of the Roman comedy, and "rodomontade," from Rodamonte, a hero of Boiardo, who, strange to say, does not brag and bluster, as the word based on his name seems to imply! It is said that Boiardo, when he had hit upon the name of his hero, had the village bells rung for joy. To Homer we are indebted for "stentorian," that is, loud-voiced, from Stentor, the Greek herald, whose voice surpassed the united shout of fifty men; and for the word "to hector," founded on the big talk of the Trojan hero.

The language of savages teems with expressions of deep interest both to the philologist and the student of human nature. Speech with them is a perpetual creation of utterances to image forth the total picture in their minds. The Indian "does not analyze his thoughts or separate his utterances; his thoughts rush forth in a troop. His speech is as a kindling cloud, not as radiant points of light." The Lenni Lenape Indians express by one polysyllable what with us requires seven monosyllables and three dis-

*From οὔ and τόπος, "no-place."

syllables, viz.: "Come with the canoe and take us across the river." This polysyllable is *nadholineen*, and it is formed by taking parts of several words and cementing them into one. In the Iroquois language one word of twenty-one letters expresses this sentence of eighteen words: "I give some money to those who have arrived, in order to buy them more clothes with it." The apparent wealth of synonyms and of grammatical forms in savage languages is due, not to the mental superiority of the races that speak them, but to their inferiority,—their deficiency in the power of abstraction. "The more barbarous a language," says Herder, "the greater is the number of its conjugations." We must not suppose that simplicity in language precedes complexity: simplicity is the triumph of science, not the spontaneous result of intelligence. The natives of the Society Isles have one word for the tail of a dog, another for the tail of a bird, and a third for the tail of a sheep, while for "tail" itself, "tail" in the abstract, they have no word whatever. The Mohicans have words for wood-cutting, cutting the head, etc., yet no verb meaning simply to cut. Even the Anglo-Saxon language, which had a sufficiency of words for all shades of green, red, blue, yellow, had to borrow from the Latin the abstract word "color," and, while possessing abundant names for every sort of crime, derived from the same source the abstract words "crime" and "transgression."

Some Indian tribes call a squirrel by a name signifying that he "can stick fast in a tree"; a mole, by a word signifying "carrying the right hand on the left shoulder"; and they have a name for a horse which means "having only one toe." Among the savages of the Pacific, "to think" is "to speak in the stomach."

WORDS OF ILLUSIVE ETYMOLOGY.

In the lapse of ages words undergo great changes of form, so that it becomes at last difficult or impossible to ascertain their origin. Terms, of which the composition was originally clear, are worn and rubbed by use like the pebbles which are fretted and rounded into shape and smoothness by the sea waves or by a rapid stream. Like the image and superscription of a coin, their meaning is often so worn away that one cannot make even a probable guess at their origin. One of the commonest causes of the corruptions of words, by which their sources and original meanings are disguised, is the instinctive dislike we feel to the use of a word that is wholly new to us, and the consequent tendency to fasten upon it a meaning which shall remove its seemingly arbitrary character. Foreign words, therefore, when adopted into a language, are especially liable to these changes, being corrupted both in pronunciation and orthography. By thus anglicizing them, we not only avoid the uncouth, barbarous sounds which are so offensive to the ear, but we help the memory by associating the words with others already known.

The mistakes which have been made in attempting to trace the origin of words thus disguised, have done not a little, at times, to bring philology into contempt. The philologist, unless he has much native good sense, and rules his inclinations with an iron rod, is apt to become a verbomaniac. There is a strange fascination in word-hunting, and his hobby-horse, it has been aptly said, is a strong goer that trifles never balk. "To him the British Channel is a surface drain, the Alps and Apennines mere posts and rails, the Mediterranean a simple brook, and

the Himalayas only an outlying cover." Cowper justly ridicules those word-hunters who, in their eagerness to make some startling discovery, never pause to consider whether there is any historic connection between two languages, one of which is supposed to have borrowed a word from another,—

> "Learned philologists, who chase
> A panting syllable through time and space,
> Start it at home, and hunt it in the dark,
> To Gaul,—to Greece,—and into Noah's ark."

A fundamental rule, to be kept constantly in sight by those who would not etymologize at random, is, that no amount of resemblance between words in different languages is sufficient to prove their relationship, nor is any amount of seeming unlikeness in sound or form sufficient to disprove their consanguinity. Many etymologies are true which appear improbable, and many appear probable which are not true. As Max Müller says: "Sound etymology has nothing to do with sound. We know words to be of the same origin which have not a single letter in common, and which differ in meaning as much as black and white." On the other hand, two words which have identically the same letters may have no etymological connection. An instance of the last case is the French *souris*, a smile, and *souris*, a mouse, from the Latin *subridere* and *sorex* respectively. Fuller amusingly says that "we are not to infer the Hebrew and the English to be cognate languages because one of the giants, son of Anak, was called *A-hi-man*;" yet some of his own etymologies, though witty and ingenious, are hardly more correct than this punning derivation. Thus "compliments," he says, is derived from *à completè mentiri*, because compliments are in general completely mendacious; and he quotes approv-

ingly Sir John Harrington's derivation of the old English "elf" and "goblin," from the names of two political factions of the Empire, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines.

Archbishop Trench speaks of an eminent philologist who deduced "girl" from *garrula*, girls being commonly talkative. "Frontispiece" is usually regarded as a piece or picture in front of a book; whereas it means literally "a front view," being from the Low Latin, *frontispicium*, the forefront of a house. The true origin of many words is hidden by errors in the spelling. "Bran-new" is brand-new, *i.e.*, "burnt new." "Grocer" should be "grosser," one who sells in the gross; "pigmy" is properly "pygmy," as Worcester spells it, and means a thing the size of one's fist (*πυγμή*). "Policy," state-craft, is rightly spelled; but "policies of insurance" ought to have the *ll*, the word being derived from *polliceor*, to promise or assure. "Island" looks as if it were compounded of "isle" and "land"; but it is the same word as the Anglo-Saxon *ealand*, water-land, compounded of *ea*, water, and "land." So Jers*ey* is literally "Cæsar's island." "Lieutenant" has been pronounced "leftenant," from a notion that this officer holds the "left" of the line while the captain holds the right. The word comes from the French, *lieu-tenant*, one holding the place of another.

"Wiseacre" has no connection with "acre." The word is a corruption, both in spelling and pronunciation, of the German *weissager*, a "wise-sayer," or sayer of wise maxims. "Gooseberry," Dr. Johnson explains as "a fruit eaten as a sauce for goose." It is, however, a corruption of the German, *krausbeere*,— from *kraus* or *gorse*, crisp; and the fruit gets its name from the upright hairs with which it is covered. "Shame-faced" does not mean having a face

denoting shame. It is from the Anglo-Saxon, *sceamfaest*, protected by shame. "Surname" is from the French, *surnom*, meaning additional name, and should not, therefore, be spelled "sirname," as if it meant the name of one's sire. "Freemason" is not half Saxon, but is from the French, *frèremaçon*, brother mason. "Foolscap" is a corruption of the Italian, *foglio capo*, a full-sized sheet of paper. "Country-dance" is a corruption of the French *contre-danse*, in which the partners stand in opposite lines.

"Bishop," which looks like an Anglo-Saxon word, is from the Greek. It means primarily an overseer, in Latin *episcopus*, which the Saxons broke down into "biscop," and then softened into "bishop." There was formerly an adjective "bishoply"; but as, after the Norman Conquest, the bishops, and those who discussed their rights and duties, used French and Latin rather than English, "episcopal" has taken its place. Among the foreign words most frequently corrupted are the names of plants, which gardeners, not understanding, change into words that sound like the true ones, and with which they are familiar. In their new costume they often lose all their original significance and beauty. To this source of corruption we owe such words as "dandelion," from the French, *dent de lion*, lion's tooth; "rosemary," from *ros marinus;* "quarter-sessions rose," the meaningless name of the beautiful *rose des quatre saisons;* "Jerusalem artichoke," into which, with a ludicrous disregard for geography, we have metamorphosed the sunflower artichoke, *articiocco girasole*, which came to us from Pery, through Italy; and "sparrow-grass," which we have substituted for "asparagus."

Animals have fared no better than plants; the same dislike of outlandish words, which are meaningless to

them, leads sailors to corrupt Bellerophon into "Billy Ruffian," and hostlers to convert Othello and Desdemona into "Odd Fellow and Thursday morning," and Lamprocles into "Lamb and Pickles." The *souris dormeuse*, or sleeping mouse, has been transformed into a "dormouse"; the hog-fish, or *porcpisce*, as Spenser terms him, is disguised as a "porpoise"; and the French *écrevisse* turns up a "crayfish" or "crawfish." The transformations of the latter word, which has passed through three languages before attaining its present form, are among the most surprising feats of verbal legerdemain. Starting on its career as the old High German *krebiz*, it next appears in English as "crab," and in German as *krebs*, or "crab," from the grabbing or clutching action of the animal. Next it crosses the Rhine, and becomes the French *écrevisse;* then crosses the Channel, and takes the form of *krevys;* and, last of all, with a double effort at anglicizing, it appears in modern English as "crawfish" or "crayfish." The last two words noticed illustrate the tendency which is so strong, in the corruption of words, to invent new forms which shall be appropriate as well as significant, other examples of which we have in "wormwood" from *wermuth*, "lanthorn" from *laterna*, "beefeater" from *buffetier*, "rakehell" from *racaille*, "catchrogue" from the Norman-French *cachreau*, a bum-bailiff, and "shoot" for *chute*, a fall or rapid. So the French, *beffroi*, a stronghold or tower,—a movable tower of several stories used in besieging,—has been corrupted into "belfry," though there is no such French word as "bell."

Often the corrupted form gives birth to a wholly false explanation. Thus in the proverbial *dormir comme une taupe*, which has been twisted into the phrase "to sleep

like a top," there is no trace of the mole; and the corruption of *acheter*, to buy, into "achat,"—which in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was in London the word for trading, and was first pronounced and then written "acat,"—led to the story that Whittington, the famous Lord Mayor, obtained his wealth by selling and re-selling "a cat." There is no hint in "somerset" of its derivation from the Italian, *soprasalto*, an overleap, through the French, *sobresault*, and the early English, to "somersault"; nor would the shrewdest guesser ever discover in *faire un faux pas*, to commit a blunder, the provincial saying, "to make a fox's paw." The word "ceiling," from the old French *seel*, "a seal," was formerly written "seeling," and meant a wainscoating, a covering with boards for the purpose of sealing up chinks and cracks. The spelling was changed from an opinion that the word is derived from *ciel*, which means "heaven" and "a canopy."

Among the most frequent corruptions are the names of places and persons. Thus Penne, Coombe, and Ick, the former name of Falmouth, has been transformed into "Penny-come-quick"; and the corruption of *Chateau Vert* into "Shotover" has led to the legend that Little John "shot over" the hill of that name near Oxford, England. *Leighton-beau-desert* has been converted into "Leighton-Buzzard"; Bridge-Walter, in Somersetshire, into "Bridgewater." The *Chartreuse* has become the "Charter-House." Sheremoniers Lane, so called because the artisans dwelt there whose business it was to sheer or cut bullion into shape for the die, became first "Sheremongers Lane," and then, from its nearness to St. Paul's Cathedral, and an analogy with Amen Corner and Paternoster Row, passed into "Sermon Lane." The origin of the well known legend

of Bishop Hatto, who forestalled the corn from the poor, and was devoured in his fortress on the Rhine by rats, is owing, it is said, to a corruption of the name of the *maut-thurm*, or custom-house, into the *mäuse-thurm*, or "Mouse-tower." The Cologne myth of the eleven thousand virgins is supposed by an English philologist to have sprung from the name of St. Undecemilla, a virgin martyr. "The insertion of a single letter in the calendar has changed this name into the form '*Undecem millia Virg. Mart.*' The bones of the eleven thousand, which are reverently shown to the pious pilgrim, have been pronounced by Professor Owen to comprise the remains of almost all the quadrupeds indigenous to the district." The name "Gypsies" is a misnomer springing out of an error in ethnology. When they first appeared in Europe, nearly five centuries ago, their dark complexion and their unknown language led men to suppose that they were Egyptians, which word was corrupted into "Gypsies." Boulogne Mouth was corrupted by the British sailors into "Bull and Mouth"; and Surajah Dowlah, the name of the Bengal prince who figured in the famous Black Hole atrocity, the British soldiers persisted in anglicizing into "Sir Roger Dowlas"! "Bedlam" is a corruption of Bethlehem, and gets its meaning from a London priory, St. Mary's of Bethlehem, which was converted into a lunatic asylum.

"To curry favor" is said to be a corrupt translation of the French proverbial phrase *étriller Fauveau*, "to curry the chestnut horse." It was usual to make a proper name of the color of a horse, as Bayard, Dun, Ball, Favel, etc. Hence the proverbs, "To have Ball in the stable," "Dun in the mire," "To curry Favel," in which last some unknown Bentley substituted "favor" for Favel when the

meaning of the latter had ceased to be understood. Another striking illustration of the freaks of popular usage by which the etymology of words is obscured, is the word "causeway." Mr. W. W. Skeat, in a late number of "Notes and Queries," states that the old spelling of the word was "calcies." The Latin was *calceata via*, a road made with lime; hence the Spanish, *calzada*, a paved way, and the modern French, *chaussée*. "The English Word," Mr. Skeats says, "used to be more often spelled 'causey,' as, for instance, by Cotgrave; and popular etymology, always on the alert to infuse some sort of meaning into a strange word, turned 'causey' into 'causeway,' with the trifling drawback that, while we all know what 'way' means, no one can extract any sense out of 'cause.'"

Words from the dead languages have naturally undergone the most signal corruptions, many of them completely disguising the derivation. Sometimes the word is condensed, as in "alms," from the Greek ἐλεημοσύνη, in early English, "almesse," now cut down to four letters; "summons," a legal term, abbreviated (like the *fi. fa.* of the lawyers) from *submoneas*; "palsy," an abridgment of "paralysis," literally a relaxation; "quinsy," in French *esquinancie*, which, strange to say, is the same word as "synagogue," coming, like this last, from σύν, together, and ἄγω, to draw. "Megrim" is a corruption of "hemicrany," a pain affecting half of the head. "Treacle," now applied only to molasses or sirup, was originally viper's flesh made into a medicine for the viper's bite. It is called in French *thériaque*, from a corresponding Greek word; in early English, "triacle." "Zero" is a contraction of the Italian *zephiro*, a zephyr, a breath of air, a nothing. Another name for it is "cipher," from the Arabic, *cifr*, empty.

CONTRADICTORY MEANINGS.

Among the curious phenomena of language one of the most singular is the use of the same word in two distinct senses, directly opposed to each other. Ideas are associated in the mind not only by resemblance but by contrast; and thus the same root, slightly modified, may express the most opposite meanings. A striking example of this, is the word "fast," which is full of contradictory meanings. A clock is called "fast," when it goes too quickly; but a man is told to stand "fast," when he is desired to stand still. Men "fast" when they have nothing to eat; and they eat "fast" after a long abstinence. "Fast" men, as we have already seen, are apt to be very "loose" in their habits. When "fast" is used in the sense of "abstinence," the idea may be, as in the Latin, *abstineo*, holding back from food; or the word may come from the Gothic, *fastan*, "to keep" or "observe,"— that is, the ordinance of the church. The verb "to overlook" is used in two contradictory senses; as, he overlooked the men at work, he overlooked the error.

The word "nervous" may mean either possessing or wanting nerve. A "nervous" writer is one who has force and energy; a "nervous" man is one who is weak, sensitive to trifles, easily excited. The word "post," from the Latin *positum*, placed, is used in the most various senses. We speak of a "post"-office, of "post"-haste, of "post"-horses, and of "post"-ing a ledger. The contradiction in these meanings is more apparent than real. The idea of "placing" is common to them all. Before the invention of railways, letters were transmitted from place to place (or post to post) by relays of horses stationed at in-

tervals so that no delay might occur. The "post"-office used this means of communication, and the horses were said to travel "post"-haste. To "post" a ledger is to place or register its several items.

The word "to let" generally means to permit; but in the Bible, in Shakespeare, and in legal phraseology, it often has the very opposite meaning. Thus Hamlet says, "I'll make a ghost of him that lets me," that is, interferes with or obstructs me; and in law books "without let or hindrance" is a phrase of frequent occurrence. It should be remarked, however, that "to let," in the first sense, is from the Saxon, *lætan;* in the second, from *letjan.* The word "to cleave" may mean either to adhere to closely, as when Cowper says, "Sophistry cleaves close and protects sin's rotten trunk"; or it may mean to split or to rend asunder, as in the sentence, "He cleaved the stick at one blow." According to Mätzner, the word in the first sense is from the Anglo-Saxon, *cleofan, clufan;* in the last sense, it is from *clifan, clifian.* The word "dear" has the two meanings of "prized" because you have it, and "expensive" because you want it. The word "lee" has very different acceptations in "lee"-side and "lee"-shore.

The word "mistaken" has quite opposite meanings. "You are mistaken" may mean "You mistake," or "You are misunderstood," or "taken for somebody else." In the line

"*Mistaken* souls that dream of heaven,"

in a popular hymn, the word is used, of course, in the former sense. The adjective "mortal" means both "deadly" and "liable to death." Of the large number of adjectives ending in "able" or "ible," some have a subjective and others an objective sense. A "terrible" sight is one

that is able to inspire terror; but a "readable" book is one which you can read. It is said that the word "wit" is used in Pope's "Essay on Criticism" with at least seven different meanings.

The prefixes "un" and "in" are equivocal. Commonly they have a negative force, as in "unnecessary," "incomplete." But sometimes, both in verbs and adjectives, they have a positive or intensive meaning, as in the words "intense," "infatuated," "invaluable." To "invigorate" one's physical system by exercise, is not to lessen, but to increase one's energy. The verb "unloose" should, by analogy, signify "to tie," just as "untie" means "to loose." "Inhabitable" should signify "not habitable," according to the most frequent use of "in." To "unravel" means the same as "to ravel"; to "unrip" the same as "to rip." Johnson sanctions the use of the negative prefix in these two words, but Richardson and Webster condemn it as superfluous. Walton, in his "Angler," tells an amusing anecdote touching the two words. "We heard," he says, "a high contention amongst the beggars, whether it was easiest to 'rip' a cloak or 'unrip' a cloak. One beggar affirmed it was all one; but that was denied, by asking her, if doing and undoing were all one. Then another said, 'twas easiest to unrip a cloak, for that was to let it alone; but she was answered by asking how she could *unrip* it, if she let it alone."

This opposition in the meanings of a word is a phenomenon not altogether peculiar to the English language. In Greek, *θοάζειν* has the seemingly contradictory meanings of "to move hastily," and "to sit"; *χρεία* means both "use" and "need"; and *λάω* means both "to wish" and "to take." In Latin, *sacer* means "set apart" or "tabooed,"

and *unicus* implies singularity,—*unitas*, association. Many other examples might be cited to show that "as rays of light may be reflected and refracted in all possible ways from the primary direction, so the meaning of a word may be deflected from its original bearing in a variety of manners; and consequently we cannot well reach the primitive force of the term unless we know the precise gradations through which it has gone."

Several writers on our language have noticed a singular tendency to limit or narrow the signification of certain words, whose etymology would suggest a far wider application. Why should we not "retaliate" (that is, pay back in kind, *res*, *talis*) kindnesses as well as injuries? Why should we "resent" (feel again) insults, and not affectionate words and deeds? Why should our hate, animosity, hostility, and other bad passions, be "inveterate" (that is, gain strength by age), but our better feelings, love, kindness, charity, never? Byron showed a true appreciation of the better uses to which the word might be put, when he subscribed a letter to a friend, "Yours inveterately, Byron."

In some of our nouns there is a nice distinction of meaning between the singular and the plural. A "minute" is a fraction of time; "minutes" are notes of a speech, conversation, etc. The "manner" in which a man enters a drawing-room may be unexceptionable, while his "manners" are very bad. When the "Confederates" threatened to pull down the American "colors" at New Orleans, they did it under "color" of right. A person was once asked whether a certain lawyer had got rich by his practice. "No," was the sarcastic reply, "but by his practices."

CHAPTER XVI.

COMMON IMPROPRIETIES OF SPEECH.

In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold,
Alike fantastic if too new or old;
Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.—POPE.

If a gentleman be to study any language, it ought to be that of his own country.—LOCKE.

Aristocracy and exclusiveness tend to final overthrow, in language as well as in politics.—W. D. WHITNEY.

People who write essays to prove that though a word in fact means one thing, it *ought* to mean another, or that though all well educated Englishmen do conspire to use this expression, they *ought* to use that, are simply bores. —EDINBURGH REVIEW.

ONE of the most gratifying signs of the times is the deep interest which both our scholars and our people are beginning to manifest in the study of our noble English tongue. Perhaps nothing has contributed more to awaken a public interest in this matter, and to call attention to some of the commonest improprieties of speech, than the publication of "The Queen's English" and "The Dean's English," and the various criticisms which have been provoked in England and in the United States by the Moon-Alford controversy. Hundreds of persons who before felt a profound indifference to this subject, have had occasion to thank the Dean for awakening their curiosity in regard to it; and hundreds more who otherwise would never have read his dogmatic small-talk, or Mr. Moon's trenchant dissection of it, have suddenly found themselves, in consequence of the newspaper criticisms of the two books,

keenly interested in questions of grammar, and now, with their appetites whetted, will continue the study of their own language, till they have mastered its difficulties, and familiarized themselves with all its idioms and idiotisms. Of such discussions we can hardly have too many, and just now they are imperiously needed to check the deluge of barbarisms, solecisms, and improprieties, with which our language is threatened. Not only does political freedom make every man in America an inventor, alike of labor-saving machines and of labor-saving words, but the mixture of nationalities is constantly coining and exchanging new forms of speech, of which our busy Bartletts, in their lists of Americanisms, find it impossible to keep account.

It is not merely our spoken language that is disfigured by these blemishes; but our written language,— the prose of the leading English authors,— exhibits more slovenliness and looseness of diction than is found in any other literature. That this is due in part to the very character of the language itself, there can be no doubt. Its simplicity of structure and its copiousness both tend to prevent its being used with accuracy and care; and it is so hospitable to alien words that it needs more powerful securities against revolution than other languages of less heterogeneous composition. But the chief cause must be found in the character of the English-speaking race. There is in our very blood a certain lawlessness, which makes us intolerant of syntactical rules, and restive under pedagogical restraints. "Our sturdy English ancestors," says Blackstone, "held it beneath the condition of a freeman to appear, or to do any other act, at the precise time appointed." The same proud, independent spirit which made the Saxons of old rebel against the servitude

of punctuality, prompts their descendants to spurn the yoke of grammar and purism. In America this scorn of obedience, whether to political authority or philological, is fostered and intensified by the very genius of our institutions. We seem to doubt whether we are entirely free, unless we apply the Declaration of Independence to our language, and carry the Monroe doctrine even into our grammar.

The degree to which this lawlessness has been carried will be seen more strikingly if we compare our English literature with the literature of France. It has been justly said that the language of that country is a science in itself, and the labor bestowed on the acquisition of it has the effect of vividly impressing on the mind both the faults and the beauties of every writer's style. Method and perspicuity are its very essence; and there is hardly a writer of note who does not attend to these requisites with scrupulous care. Let a French writer of distinction violate any cardinal rule of grammar, and he is pounced upon instantly by the critics, and laughed at from Calais to Marseilles. When Boileau, who is a marvel of verbal and grammatical correctness, made a slip in the first line of his Ninth Satire,

"C'est *à* vous, mon Esprit, *à* qui je veux parler,"

the grammatical sensibility of the French ear was shocked to a degree that we, who tolerate the grossest solecisms, find it hard to estimate. For two centuries the blunder has been quoted by every writer on grammar, and impressed on the memory of every schoolboy. Indeed, such is the national fastidiousness on this subject, that it has been doubted whether a single line in Boileau has been

so often quoted for its beauty, as this unfortunate one for its lack of grammar. When did an English or an American writer thus offend the critical ears of his countrymen, even though he were an Alison, sinning against Lindley Murray on every page?

We are no friends to hypercriticism, or to that finical niceness which cares more for the body than for the soul of language, more for the outward expression than for the thought which it incarnates. Too much rigor is as unendurable as laxity. It is, no doubt, possible to be so over-nice in the use of words and the construction of sentences as to sap the vitality of our speech. We may so refine our expression, by continual straining in our critical sieves, as to impair both the strength and the flexibility of our noble English tongue. There are some verbal critics, who, apparently go so far as to hold that every word must have an invariable meaning, and that all relations of thoughts must be indicated by absolute and invariable formulas, thus reducing verbal expression to the rigid inflexibility of a mathematical equation. If we understand Mr. Moon's censures of Murray and Alford, some of them are based on the assumption that an ellipsis is rarely, if ever, permissible in English speech. We have no sympathy with such extremists, nor with the verbal purists who challenge all words and phrases that cannot be found in the "wells of English undefiled," that have been open for more than a hundred years. We must take the good with the bad in the incessant changes and masquerades of language. "The severe judgment of the scholar may condemn as verbiage that undergrowth of words which threatens to choke up and impoverish the great roots that have occupied the soil from the earliest times;

he may apprehend wreck and disaster to the fixedness of language when he sees words loosened from their etymons, and left to drift upon the ocean at the mercy of wind and tide; and he is justified in every seasonable and reasonable attempt he makes to reconcile current and established significations with the sanction of authority." But it must not be forgotten that language is a living, organic thing, and by the very law of its life must always be in a fluctuating state. To petrify it into immutable forms, to preserve it as one preserves fruits and flowers in spirits of wine and herbariums, is as hopeless as it would be undesirable, if we would have it a medium for the ever-changing thoughts of man.

Language is a growing thing, as truly as a tree; and as a tree, while it casts off some leaves, will continually put forth others, so a language will be perpetually growing and expanding with the discoveries of science, the extension of commerce, and the progress of thought. Such events as the growth of the Roman Empire, the introduction of Christianity, the rise of the scholastic and of the mystic theology in the middle ages, the irruption of the northern barbarians into Italy, the establishment of the Papacy, the introduction of the feudal system, the Crusades, the Reformation, the French Revolution, the American Civil War, give birth to new ideas, which clamor for new words to express them. Every age thus enriches language with new accessions of beauty and strength. Not only are new words coined, but old ones continually take on new senses; and it is only in the transition period, before they have established themselves in the general favor of good speakers and writers, that purity of style requires them to be shunned. Those who are so ignorant

of the laws of language as to resist its expansion,— who declare that it has attained at any time the limit of its development, and seek by philological bulls to check its growth,— will find that, like a vigorous forest tree, it will defy any shackles that men may bind about it; that it will reck as little of their decrees as did the advancing ocean of those of Canute. The critics who make such attempts do not see that the immobility of language would be the immobility of history. They forget that many of the purest words in our language were at one time startling novelties, and that even the dainty terms in which they challenge each new-comer, though now naturalized, had once to fight their way inch by inch. Shakespeare ridicules "element"; Fulke, in the seventeenth century, objects to such ink-horn terms as "rational," "scandal," "homicide," "ponderous," and "prodigious"; Dryden censures "embarrass," "grimace," "repartee," "foible," "tour," and "rally"; Swift denounces "hoax" as low and vulgar; Pope condemns "witless," "welkin," and "dulcet"; and Franklin, who could draw from the clouds the electric fluid which now carries language with the speed of lightning from land to land, vainly struggled against the introduction of the words "to advocate" and "to notice." In the "New World of Words," by Edward Phillips, published in 1678, there is a long list of words which he declared should be either used warily or rejected as barbarous. Among these words are the following, which are all in good use to-day: autograph, aurist, bibliograph, circumstantiate, evangelize, ferocious, holograph, inimical, misanthropist, misogynist, and syllogize.

The word "Fatherland" seems so natural that we are apt to regard it as an old word; yet the elder Disraeli

claims the honor of having introduced it. Macaulay tells us that the word "gutted," which was doubtless objected to as vulgar, was first used on the night in which James II fled from London: "The king's printing-house . . . was, to use a coarse metaphor, which then, for the first time, came into fashion, completely *gutted*." How much circumlocution is saved by the word "antecedents" (formerly a grammatical term only), in its new sense, denoting a man's past history; with reference to which Punch says it would be more satisfactory to know something of a suspected man's *relatives* than of his *antecedents!* What a happy, ingenious use of an old word is that of "telescope" to describe a railway accident, when the force of a collision causes the cars to run or fit into each other, like the shortening slides of a telescope! The term is so picturesque and so convenient in avoiding a periphrasis, that it cannot fail to be stamped with the seal of good usage. How admirably was a real void in the vocabulary filled by the word "squatter," when it was first coined! The man who first uttered it gave vivid expression to an idea which had existed vaguely in the brains of thousands; and it was hardly spoken before it was on every tongue. Coleridge observes truly that any new word expressing a fact or relationship, not expressed by any other word in the language, is a new organ of thought; and how true is this of the terms "solidarity" (as in the phrase "solidarity of the peoples"), and "international," both of which express novel and characteristic conceptions of our own century. The latter word is a coinage of Jeremy Bentham, to whom we are also indebted for "codify," "maximise," and "minimise." The little word "its" had to force its way into the language, against the opposition of "correct"

speakers and writers, on the ground of its apparent analogy with the other English possessives.

Dr. Johnson objected to the word "dun" in Lady Macbeth's famous soliloquy, declaring that the "efficacy of this invocation is destroyed by the insertion of an epithet now seldom heard but in the stable:—"

> "Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell."

It was a notion of the great critic and lexicographer, with which his mind was long haunted, that the language should be refined and fixed so as finally to exclude all rustic and vulgar elements from the authorized vocabulary of the lettered and polite. Dryden had hinted at the establishment of an academy for this purpose, and Swift thought the Government "should devise some means for ascertaining and *fixing the language forever*," after the necessary alterations should be made in it.

If it were possible to exclude needed new words from a language, the French Academy would have succeeded in its attempts to do so, consisting as it did of the chief scholars of France. Not content with crushing political liberty, Richelieu sought to become autocrat of the French language. No word was to be uttered anywhere in the realm until he had countersigned it. But in spite of all the efforts of his Academy to exercise a despotic authority over the French tongue, new words have continually forced their way in, and so they will continue to do while the French nation maintains its vitality, in spite of the protests of all the purists and academicians in France. "They that will fight custom with grammar," says Montaigne, "are fools"; and, with the limitations to be hereafter stated, the remark is just, and still more true of those who triumphantly appeal

against custom to the dictionary, which is not merely a home for living words, but a cemetery for the dead.

Even slang words, after long knocking, will often gain admission into a language, like pardoned outlaws received into the body of respectable citizens. We need not add to these, words coined in his lofty moods by the poet, who is a *maker* by the very right of his name. That creative energy which distinguishes him,—"the high-flying liberty of conceit proper to the poet,"—will, of course, display itself here, and the all-fusing imagination will at once, as Trench has remarked, suggest and justify audacities in speech which would not be tolerated from creeping prose-writers. Great liberties may be allowed, too, within certain bounds, to the idiosyncrasies of all great writers. We love the rugged, gnarled oak, with the grotesque contortions of its branches, better than the smoothly clipped uniformity of the Dutch yew tree. Carlyleisms may therefore be tolerated from the master, though not from the *umbræ* that spaniel him at the heels, and feebly echo his singularities and oddities. A style that has no smack or flavor of the man that uses it is a tasteless style. But there is a limit even to the liberty of great thinkers in coining words. It must not degenerate into license. Coleridge was a skilful mint-master of words, yet not all his genius can reconcile us to such expressions as the following, in a letter to Sir Humphrey Davy: "I was a well meaning sutor who had ultra-crepidated with more zeal than wisdom."

No one would hesitate to place Isaac Barrow among the greatest masters of the English tongue; yet the weighty thoughts which his words represented did not prevent many of the trial-pieces which he coined in his verbal mint from being returned on his hands. Who knows the mean-

ing of such words as "avoce," "acquist," "extund"? Sir Thomas Browne abounds in such hyperlatinistic expressions as "bivious," "quodlibetically," "cunctation," to which even his gorgeous rhetoric does not reconcile the reader. Charles Lamb has "agnise" and "bourgeon." Coleridge invents "extroitive," "retroitive," "influencive"; Bentley, "commentitious," "negoce," "exscribe." Sydney Smith was continually coining words, some of them compounds from the homely Saxon idiom, others big-wig classical epithets, devised with scholar-like precision, and exceedingly ludicrous in their effect. Thus he speaks of "frugiverous" children, of "mastigophorous" schoolmasters, of "fugacious" or "plumigerous" captains; of "lachrymal and suspirious" clergymen; of people who are "simious," and people who are "anserous"; he enriches the language with the expressive hybrid, "Foolometer"; and he characterizes the September sins of the English by the awful name of "perdricide." In the early ages of our literature, when the language was less fixed, and there were few recognized standards of expression, writers coined words without license, supplying the place of correct terms, when they did not occur to their minds, by analogy and invention. But a bill must not only be drawn by the word-maker; it must also be accepted. The Emperor Tiberius was very properly told that he might give citizenship to men, but not to words. All innovations in speech, every new term introduced, should harmonize with the general principles of the language. No new phrase should be admitted which is not consonant with its peculiar genius, or which does violence to its fundamental integrity. Nor should any form of expression be tolerated that violates the universal laws of language. As Henry Rogers has well said, a philosophical

mind will consider that, whatever deflection may have taken place in the original principles of a language, whatever modification of form it may have undergone, it is, at each period of its history, the product of a slow accumulation and countless multitude of associations, which can neither be hastily formed nor hastily dismissed; that these associations extend even to the modes of spelling and pronouncing, of inflecting and combining words; and that anything which does violence to such associations impairs, for the time, at least, the power of the language.

Even good usage itself is but a proximate and strongly presumptive test of purity. Custom is not an absolute despotism, though it approaches very nearly to that character. Its decisions are generally authoritative; but, as there are extreme measures which even oriental despots cannot put into execution without endangering the safety of their possessions, so there are things which custom cannot do without endangering the fixity and purity of language. If grammatical monstrosities exist in a language, a correct taste will shun them, as it does physical deformities in the arts of design. Dean Alford defends some of his own indefensible expressions by citing the authority of the Scripture; but authority for the most vicious forms of speech can be found in all our writers, not excepting King James's translators,—as Mr. Harrison has shown by hundreds of examples in his work on "The English Language." Take, for example, the following sentence, or part of a sentence, from so great a writer as Dean Swift: "Breaking a constitution by the very same errors, *that* so many have been *broke* before." Here, in a sentence of only fifteen words, we have three grammatical errors, glaring, and, in such a writer, unpardonable. We smile

at the rustic ignorance which has engraved on a Hampshire tombstone such lines as

> "*Him* shall never come again to *we*;
> But *us* shall one day surely go to *he;*"

but is this couplet a whit more ungrammatical than Scott's "I know not *whom* else are expected," in "the Pirate"; or Southey's sentence in "the Doctor," "Gentle reader, let you and *I*, in like manner, endeavor to improve the enclosure of the Carr;" or Professor Aytoun's

> "But it were vain for you and *I*
> In single fight our strength to try."

A writer in "Blackwood" affirms that, "with the exception of Wordsworth, there is not one celebrated author of this day who has written two pages consecutively without some flagrant impropriety in the grammar;" and the statement, we believe, is undercharged. The usage, therefore, of a good writer is only *prima facie* evidence of the correctness of a disputed word or phrase; for he may have used the word carelessly or inadvertently, and it is altogether probable that, were his attention called to it, he would be prompt to admit his error. It has been remarked that "nowadays" and "had have" meet all the conditions of good usage, being reputable, national, and present; but one is a solecism, the other a barbarism. Again, if the writer is an old writer, like Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, or Addison, his authority must always be received with caution, and with increasing caution as we recede from the age in which he flourished. The great changes which our language has undergone within even a hundred years, show that the writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are unsafe guides for the nineteenth, unless they are corroborated by contemporary

usage. Let the English language be enriched in the spirit, and according to the principles of which we have spoken, and it will be, not a tank, but a living stream, casting out everything effete and impure, refreshed by new sources of inspiration and wealth, keeping pace with the stately march of the ages, and still retaining much of its original sweetness, expression and force.

It is our intention in this chapter, not to notice all the improprieties of speech that merit censure,—to do which would require volumes,—but to criticise some of those which most frequently offend the ear of the scholar in this country. The term *impropriety* we shall use, not merely in the strictly rhetorical sense of the word, but in the popular meaning, to include in it all inaccuracies of speech, whether offences against etymology, lexicography, or syntax. To pillory such offences, to point out the damage which they inflict upon our language, and to expose the moral obliquity which often lurks beneath them, is, we believe, the duty of every scholar who knows how closely purity of speech, like personal cleanliness, is allied to purity of thought and rectitude of action. To say that every person who aspires to be esteemed a gentleman should carefully shun all barbarisms, solecisms, and other faults in his speech, is to utter the merest truism. The man who habitually deviates from the custom of his country in expressing his thoughts, is hardly less ridiculous than one who walks the streets in a Spanish cloak or a Roman toga. An accurate knowledge and a correct and felicitous use of words are, of themselves, almost sure proofs of good breeding. No doubt it marks a weak mind to care more for the casket than for the jewel it contains, —to prefer elegantly turned sentences to sound sense;

but sound sense always acquires additional value when expressed in pure English. Moreover, he who carefully studies accuracy of expression, the proper choice and arrangement of words in any language, will be also advancing toward accuracy of thought, as well as toward propriety and energy of speech; "for divers philosophers hold," says Shakespeare, "that the lip is parcel of the mind." Few things are more ludicrous than the blunders by which even persons moving in refined society often betray the grossest ignorance of very common words. A story is told in England of an over-classical Member of Parliament, who, not knowing or forgetting that "omnibus" is the plural of the Latin "*omnis*," and means "for all,"—that is, a vehicle in which people of all ranks may sit together,—spoke of "two omnibi." There are hundreds of educated persons who speak of the "banister" of a staircase, when they mean "balustrade," or "baluster"; there is no such word as "banister." There are hundreds of others who never *eat* anything, not even an apple, but always *partake*, even though they consume all the food before them; and even the London "Times," in one of its issues, spoke of a jury "immersing" a defendant in damages. We once knew an old lady in a New England village, quite aristocratic in her feelings and habits, who complained to her physician that "her blood seemed to have all *stackpoled;*" and we have heard of another descendant of Mrs. Malaprop, who, in answer to the question whether she would be sure to keep an appointment, replied, "I will come,—*alluding* it does not rain."

Goldsmith is one of the most charming writers in our language; yet in his "History of England," the following statement occurs in a chapter on the reign of Elizabeth.

Speaking of a communication to Mary, Queen of Scots, he says: "This they effected by conveying their letters to her by means of a brewer, *that supplied the family with ale through a chink in the wall of her apartment.*" A queer brewer that, to supply his ale through a chink in the wall! Again, we read in Goldsmith's "History of Greece": "*He* wrote to that distinguished philosopher in terms polite and flattering, begging of *him* to come and undertake *his* education, and bestow on *him* those useful lessons of magnanimity and virtue which every great man ought to possess, and which *his* numerous avocations rendered impossible for *him.*" In this sentence the pronoun *he* is employed six times, under different forms; and as, in each case, it may refer to either of two antecedents, the meaning, but for our knowledge of the facts, would be involved in hopeless confusion. First, the pronoun stands for Philip, then for Aristotle, then for Alexander, again for Alexander, and then twice for Philip. A still greater offender against clearness in the use of pronouns is Lord Clarendon; *e.g.*, "On which, with the king's and queen's so ample promises to *him* (the Treasurer) so few hours before, conferring the place upon another, and the Duke of York's manner of receiving *him* (the Treasurer), after *he* (the Chancellor) had been shut up with *him* (the Duke), as *he* (the Treasurer) was informed might very well excuse *him* (the Treasurer) from thinking *he* (the Chancellor) had some share in the effront *he* (the Treasurer) had undergone." It would be hard to match this passage even in the writings of the humblest penny-a-liner; it is "confusion worse confounded."

Solecisms so glaring as these may not often disfigure men's writing or speech; and some of the faults we shall

notice may seem so petty and microscopic that the reader may deem us "word-catchers that live on syllables." But it is the little foxes that spoil the grapes, in the familiar speech of the people as well as in Solomon's vineyards; and, as a garment may be honey-combed by moths, so the fine texture of a language may be gradually destroyed, and its strength impaired, by numerous and apparently insignificant solecisms and inaccuracies. Nicety in the use of particles is one of the most decisive marks of skill and scholarship in a writer; and the accuracy, beauty, and force of many a fine passage in English literature depend largely on the use of the pronouns, prepositions, and articles. How emphatic and touching does the following enumeration become through the repetition of one petty word! "*By* thine agony and bloody sweat; *by* thy cross and passion; *by* thy precious death and burial; *by* thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and *by* the coming of the Holy Ghost." How much pathos is added to the prayer of the publican by the proper translation of the Greek article,—"God be merciful to me *the* sinner!"

De Quincey strikingly observes: "People that have practised composition as much, and with as vigilant an eye as myself, know also, by thousands of cases, how infinite is the disturbance caused in the logic of a thought by the mere position of a word as despicable as the word *even*. A mote that is in itself invisible, shall darken the august faculty of sight in a human eye,—the heavens shall be hid by a wretched atom that dares not show itself, —and the station of a syllable shall cloud the judgment of a council. Nay, even an ambiguous emphasis falling to the right-hand word, or the left-hand word, shall confound a system." It is a fact well known to lawyers,

that the omission or misplacement of a monosyllable in a legal document has rendered many a man bankrupt. Fifteen years ago an expensive lawsuit arose in England, on the meaning of two phrases in the will of a deceased nobleman. In the one he gives his property "to my brother and *to* his children in succession"; in the other, "to my brother and his children in succession." This diversity gives rise to quite different interpretations. In another case, by omitting the letter *s* in a legal document, an English attorney is said to have inflicted on a client a loss of £30,000.

In language, as in the fine arts, there is but one way to attain to excellence, and that is by study of the most faultless models. As the air and manner of a gentleman can be acquired only by living constantly in good society, so grace and purity of expression must be attained by a familiar acquaintance with the standard authors. It is astonishing how rapidly we may by this practice enrich our vocabularies, and how speedily we imitate and unconsciously reproduce in our language the niceties and delicacies of expression which have charmed us in a favorite author. Like the sheriff whom Rufus Choate satirized for having "overworked the participle," most persons make one word act two, ten or a dozen parts; yet there is hardly any man who may not, by moderate painstaking, learn to express himself in terms as precise, if not as vivid, as those of Pitt, whom Fox so praised for his accuracy.* The account which Lord Chesterfield gives of the method by which he became one of the most elegant and polished talkers and orators of Europe, strikingly shows what miracles may be achieved by care and practice.

* See page 26.

Early in life he determined not to speak one word in conversation which was not the fittest he could recall; and he charged his son never to deliver the commonest order to a servant, but in the best language he could find, and with the best utterance. For years Chesterfield wrote down every brilliant passage he met with in his reading, and translated it into French, or, if it was in a foreign language, into English. By this practice a certain elegance became habitual to him, and it would have given him more trouble, he says, to express himself inelegantly than he had ever taken to avoid the defect. Lord Bolingbroke, who had an imperial dominion over all the resources of expression, and could talk all day just as perfectly as he wrote, told Chesterfield that he owed the power to the same cause,—an early and habitual attention to his style. When Boswell expressed to Johnson his surprise at the constant force and propriety of the Doctor's words, the latter replied that he had long been accustomed to clothe his thoughts in the fittest words he could command, and thus a vivid and exact phraseology had become habitual.

It has been affirmed by a high authority that a knowledge of English grammar is rather a matter of convenience as a nomenclature,—a medium of thought and discussion *about* the language,—than a guide to the actual use of it; and that it is as impossible to acquire the complete command of our own tongue by the study of grammatical precept, as to learn to walk or swim by attending a course of lectures on anatomy. "Undoubtedly I have found," says Sir Philip Sydney, "in divers smal learned courtiers a more sound stile than in some possessors of learning; of which I can ghesse no other cause, but that the courtier following that which by practice

he findeth fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) doth *according* to art, though not *by* art; where the other, using art to shew art, and not to hide art (as in these cases he should doe), flieth from nature, and indeed abuseth art."

Let it not be inferred, however, from all this that grammatical knowledge is unnecessary. A man of refined taste may detect many errors by the ear; but there are other errors, equally gross, that have not a harsh sound, and consequently cannot be detected without a knowledge of the rules that are violated. Besides, it often happens, as we have already seen, that even the purest writers inadvertently allow some inaccuracies to creep into their productions. The works of Addison, Swift, Bentley, Pope, Young, Blair, Hume, Gibbon, and even Johnson, that leviathan of literature, are disfigured by numberless instances of slovenliness of style. Cobbett, in his "Grammar of the English Language," says that he noted down about two hundred improprieties of language in Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" alone; and he points out as many more, at least, in the "Rambler," which the author says he revised and corrected with extraordinary care. Sydney Smith, one of the finest stylists of this century, has not a few flagrant solecisms; and, strange to say, some of them occur in a passage in which he is trying to show that the English language "may be learned, practically and *unerringly*," without a knowledge of grammatical rules. "When," he asks, "do we ever find a well educated Englishman *or* Frenchman embarrassed by an ignorance of the grammar of *their* respective languages? *They* first learn it practically and unerringly; and then, if *they* chose (choose?) to look back and smile at the idea of having proceeded

by a number of rules, without knowing one of them by heart, or being conscious that they had any rule at all, this is a philosophical amusement; but who ever *thinks* of learning the grammar of *their* own tongue, before *they* are very good grammarians!" The best refutation of the reasoning in this passage is found in the bad grammar of the passage itself.

Even the literary detectives, who spend their time in hunting down and showing up the mistakes of others, enjoy no immunity from error. Harrison, in his excellent work on "The English Language," written expressly to point out some of the most prevalent solecisms in its literature, has such solecisms as the following: "The *authority* of Addison, in matters of grammar; of Bentley, who never made the English grammar his study; of Bolingbroke, Pope, and others, *are* as nothing." Breen, who in his "Modern English Literature: its Blemishes and Defects," has shown uncommon critical acumen, writes thus: "There is *no* writer so addicted to this blunder as Isaac D'Israeli." Again, in criticising a faulty expression of Alison, he sins almost as grievously himself by saying: "It would have been correct to say: 'Suchet's administration was incomparably less oppressive than that of *any* of the French generals in the Peninsula.'" This reminds one of the statement that "Noah and his family outlived all who lived before the flood,"—that is, they outlived themselves. Latham, in his profound treatise on "The English Language," has such sentences as this: "The logical and historical *analysis* of a language generally in some degree *coincides*." Here the syntax is correct; but the sense is sacrificed, since a coincidence implies at least two things. In the London "Saturday Review," which

"is nothing if not critical," we find such a cacophonous sentence as the following: "In personal relations Mr. Bright is probab*ly* general*ly* kind*ly*." Blair's "Rhetoric" has been used as a text-book for half a century; yet it swarms with errors of grammar and rhetoric, against almost every law of which he has sinned. Moon, in his review of Alford, has pointed out hundreds of faults in "The Dean's English," as censurable as any which he has censured; and newspaper critics, at home and abroad, have pointed out scores of obscurations, as well as of glaring faults, in Moon.

It has been well observed by Professor Marsh that most men would be unable to produce a good caricature of their own individual speech, and that the shibboleth of our personal dialect is unknown to ourselves, however ready we may be to remark the characteristic phraseology of others. "It is a mark of weakness, of poverty of speech, or, at least, of bad taste, to continue the use of pet words, or other peculiarities of language, after we have once become conscious of them as such." There are certain stock phrases, also, which, though not objectionable in themselves, have been so worn to shreds by continual repetition in speech and in the press, that a man of taste will shun using them as instinctively as he shuns a solecism. A few examples are the following: "History repeats itself," "The irony of fate," "That goes without saying," "Ample scope and verge enough," "We are free to confess," "Conspicuous by its absence," "The courage of his convictions."

We proceed to notice some of the common improprieties of speech. Many of them are of recent origin, others are

old offenders that have been tried and condemned at the bar of criticism again and again:—

But, for that, or if. Example: "I have no doubt but he will come to-night." "I should not wonder but that was the case."

Agriculturalist, for agriculturist, is an impropriety of the grossest sort. Nine-tenths of our writers on agriculture use the former expression. They might as well say geologicalist, instead of geologist, or chemicalist, instead of chemist.

Deduction, for induction. *Induction* is the mental process by which we ascend to the discovery of general truths; *deduction* is the process by which the law governing particulars is derived from a knowledge of the law governing the class to which particulars belong.

Illy is a gross barbarism, quite common in these days, especially with newly fledged poets. There is no such word as *illy* in the language. The noun, adjective, and adverb, are *ill*.

Plenty, for plentiful. Stump politicians tell us that the adoption of a certain measure "will make money plenty in every man's pocket."

I have got, for I have. Hardly any other word in the language is so abused as the word *get*. A man says, "I have got a cold"; he means simply, "I have a cold." Another says that a certain lady "has got a fine head of hair," which may be true if the hair is false, but it is probably intended as a compliment. A third says: "I have got to leave the city for New York this evening," meaning only that he *has* to leave the city, etc. Nine out of ten ladies who enter a dry-goods store, ask, "Have you got" such or such an article? If such a phrase as "I have possess" were

used, all noses would turn up together; but "I have got," when used to signify "I have," is equally a departure from propriety. A man may say, "I have got more than my neighbor has, because I have been more industrious"; but he cannot with propriety say, "I have got a long nose," however long his nose may be, unless it be an artificial one. Even so able a writer as Prof. Whitney expresses himself thus: "Who ever yet got through learning his mother tongue, and could say, 'The work is done'?"

Recommend. This word is used in a strange sense by many persons. Political conventions often pass resolutions beginning thus: "Resolved, that the Republicans (or Democrats) of this county be recommended to meet," etc.

Differ with is often used, in public debate, instead of *differ from.* Example: "I differ with the learned gentleman, entirely,"—which is intended to mean, that the speaker holds views different from those of the gentleman; not that he agrees with the gentleman in differing from the views of a third person. *Different to* is often spoken and written in England, and occasionally in this country, instead of *different from.* An example of this occurs in Queen Victoria's book, edited by Mr. Helps.

Corporeal, for corporal, is a gross vulgarism, the use of which at this day should almost subject an educated man to the kind of punishment which the latter adjective designates. *Corporeal* means, having a body corporal, or belonging to a body.

Wearies, for is wearied. Example: "The reader soon wearies of such stuff."

Any how is an exceedingly vulgar phrase, though used even by so elegant a writer as Blair. Example: "If the damage can be any how repaired," etc. The use of this

expression, *in any manner*, by one who professes to write and speak the English tongue with purity, is unpardonable.

It were, for it is. Example: "It were a consummation devoutly to be wished for." Dr. Chalmers says: "It were an intolerable spectacle, even to the inmates of a felon's cell, did they behold one of their fellows in the agonies of death." For *were* put *would be*, and for *did* put *should*.

Doubt is a word much abused by a class of would-be laconic speakers, who affect an Abernethy-like brevity of language. "I doubt such is the true meaning of the Constitution," say our "great expounders," looking wondrous wise. They mean, "I doubt whether," etc.

Lie, lay. Gross blunders are committed in the use of these words; *e.g.*, "He laid down on the grass," instead of "he laid himself down," or, "he lay down." The verb *to lie* (to be in a horizontal position) is *lay* in the preterite. The book does not *lay* on the table; it *lies* there. Some years ago an old lady consulted an eccentric Boston physician, and, in describing her disease, said: "The trouble, Doctor, is that I can neither lay nor set." "Then, Madam," was the reply, "I would respectfully suggest the propriety of roosting."

"*Like I did*," is a gross western and southern vulgarism for "as I did." "You will feel like lightning ought to strike you," said a learned Doctor of Divinity at a meeting in the East. Even so well informed a writer as R. W. Dale, D.D., says: "A man's style, if it is a good one, fits his thought *like* a good coat fits his figure." *Like* is a preposition, and should not be used as a conjunction.

Less, for fewer. "Not less than fifty persons." *Less* relates to quantity; *fewer*, to number.

Balance, for remainder. "I'll take the balance of the goods."

Revolt, for are revolting to. "Such doctrines revolt us."

Alone, for only. Quackenboss, in his "Course of Composition and Rhetoric," says, in violation of one of his own rules: "This means of communication, as well as that which follows, is employed by man alone." *Only* is often misplaced in a sentence. Miss Braddon says, in the prospectus of "Belgravia," her English magazine, that "it will be written in good English. In its pages papers of sterling merit will only appear." A poor beginning this! She means that "only papers of sterling merit will appear." Bolingbroke says: "Believe me, the providence of God has established such an order in the world, that, of all that belongs to us, the least valuable parts can alone fall under the will of others." The last clause should be, "only the least valuable parts can fall under the will of others." The word *merely* is misplaced in the following sentence from a collegiate address on eloquence: "It is true of men as of God, that words merely meet no response,— only such as are loaded with thought."

Likewise, for also. *Also* classes together things or qualities, whilst *likewise* couples actions or states of being. "He did it likewise," means he did it in like manner. An English Quaker was once asked by a lawyer whether he could tell the difference between *also* and *likewise*. "O, yes," was the reply, "Erskine is a great lawyer; his talents are universally admired. You are a lawyer also, but not like-*wise*."

Avocation, for vocation, or calling. A man's *avocations* are those pursuits or amusements which engage his atten-

tion when he is "called away from" his regular business or profession,—as music, fishing, boating.

Crushed out, for crushed. "The rebellion has been crushed out." Why *out*, rather than *in?* If you tread on a worm, you simply crush him,—that is all. It ought to satisfy the most vengeful foe of "the rebels" that they have been crushed, without adding the needless cruelty of crushing them *out*, which is to be as vindictive as Alexander, of whom Dryden tells us that

> "Thrice he routed all his foes,
> And thrice he slew the slain."

Of, for from. Example: "Received of John Smith fifty dollars." Usage, perhaps, sanctions this.

At all is a needless expletive, which is employed by many writers of what may be called the forcible-feeble school. For example: "The coach was upset, but, strange to say, not a passenger received the slightest injury at all." "It is not at all strange."

But that, for that. This error is quite common among those who think themselves above learning anything more from the dictionary and grammar. Trench says: "He never doubts but that he knows their intention." A worse error is *but what*, as in the reply of Mr. Jobling, of "Bleak House": "Thank you, Guppy, I don't know but what I will take a marrow pudding." "He would not believe but what I was joking."

Convene is used by many persons in a strange sense. "This road will convene the public."

Evidence is a word much abused by learned judges and attorneys,—being continually used for *testimony*. *Evidence* relates to the convictive view of any one's mind; *testimony*, to the knowledge of another concerning some

fact. The evidence in a case is often the reverse of the testimony.

Had have. E. g. The London "Times" says "Sir Wilfred Lawson *had* better *have* kept to his original proposal." This is a very low vulgarism, notwithstanding it has the authority of Addison. It is quite common to say "Had I have seen him," "Had you have known it," etc. We can say, "I have been," "I had been," but what sort of a tense is *had have* been?

Had ought, had better, had rather. All these expressions are absurdities, no less gross than *hisn, tother, baint, theirn.* No doubt there is plenty of good authority for *had better* and *had rather;* but how can future action be expressed by a verb that signifies past and completed possession?

At, for by. *E. g.*, "Sales at auction." The word auction signifies a *manner* of sale; and this signification seems to require the preposition *by.*

The above, as an adjective. "The above extract is sufficient to verify my assertion." "I fully concur in the above statement" (the statement above, or the foregoing statement). Charles Lamb speaks of "the above boys and the below boys."

Then, as an adjective. "The then King of Holland." This error, to which even educated men are addicted, springs from a desire of brevity; but verbal economy is not commendable when it violates the plainest rules of language.

Final completion. As every completion is final, the adjective is superfluous. A similar objection applies to *first beginning.* Similar to these superabundant forms of expression is another, in which *universal* and *all* are brought into the same construction. A man is said to be "univer-

sally esteemed by all who know him." If *all* esteem him, he is, of course, *universally* esteemed; and the converse is equally true.

Party, for man or woman. This error, so common in England, is becoming more and more prevalent here. An English witness once testified that he saw "a short party" (meaning person) "go over the bridge." Another Englishman, who had looked at a portrait of St. Paul in a gallery at Florence, being asked his opinion of the picture, said that he thought "the party was very well executed." It is hardly necessary to say that it takes several persons to make a party.

Celebrity is sometimes applied to celebrated persons, instead of being used abstractly; *e.g.*, "Several celebrities are at the Palmer House."

Equanimity of mind. As equanimity (*æquus animus*) means evenness of mind, why should "of mind" be repeated? "Anxiety of mind" is less objectionable, but the first word is sufficient.

Don't for doesn't, or does not. Even so scholarly a divine as the Rev. Dr. Bellows, of New York, employs this vulgarism four times in an article in the "Independent." "A man," he says, "who knows only his family and neighbors, don't know them; a man who only knows the present don't know that. . . . Many a man, with a talent for making money, don't know whether he is rich or poor, because he don't understand bookkeeping," etc.

Predicate, for found. *E.g.*, "His argument was predicated on the assumption," etc.

Try, for make. *E.g.*, "Try the experiment."

Superior, for able, virtuous, etc. *E.g.*, "He is a supe-

rior man." Not less vulgar is the expression, "an inferior man," for a man of small abilities.

Deceiving, for trying to deceive. *E.g.*, a person says to another, "You are deceiving me," when he means exactly the opposite, namely, "You are trying to deceive me, but you cannot succeed, for your trickery is transparent."

The masses, for the people generally. "The masses must be educated." The masses of what?

In our midst. This vulgarism is continually heard in prayer-meetings, and from the lips of Doctors of Divinity, though its incorrectness has been exposed again and again. The second chapter in Prof. Schele De Vere's excellent "Studies in English" begins thus: "When a man rises to eminence in our midst," etc.,— which is doubtless one of the few errors in his book *quas incuria fudit.* The possessive pronoun can properly be used only to indicate possession or appurtenance. "The midst" of a company or society is not a thing belonging or appurtenant to the company, or to the individuals composing it. It is a mere term of relation of an adverbial, not of a substantive character, and is an intensified form of expression for *among.* Would any one say, "In our middle"?

Excessively, for exceedingly. Ladies often complain that the weather is "excessively hot," thereby implying that they do not object to the heat, but only to the excess of heat. They mean simply that the weather is *very* hot.

Either is applicable only to two objects; and the same remark is true of *neither* and *both.* "Either of the three" is wrong; so is this,— "Ten burglars broke into the house, but neither of them could be recognized." Say, "*none* of them," or "*not one* of them could be recognized."

Either is sometimes improperly used for *each; e.g.*, "On either side of the river was the tree of life,"— Rev. xxi, 2. Here it is not meant that if you do not find that the tree of life was on *this* side, it was on *that;* but that the tree of life was on each side,—on this side, and on that. The proper use of *either* was vindicated some years ago in England, by the Court of Chancery. A certain testator left property, the disposition of which was affected by "the death of either" of two persons. One learned counsel contended that the word "either" meant both; in support of this view he quoted Richardson, Webster, Chaucer, Dryden, Southey, the history of the crucifixion, and a passage from the Revelation. The learned judge suggested that there was an old song in the "Beggar's Opera," known to all, which took the opposite view:

"How happy could I be with either,
Were t'other dear charmer away."

In pronouncing judgment, the judge dissented entirely from the argument of the learned counsel. "Either," he said, "means one of two, and does not mean both." Though occasionally, by poets and some other writers, the word was employed to signify *both*, it did not in the case before the court.

Whether is a contraction of *which of either*, and therefore cannot be correctly applied to more than two objects.

Never, for ever. *E.g.*, "Charm he never so wisely"; "Let the offence be of never so high a nature." Many grammarians approve of this use of *never;* but its correctness, to say the least, is doubtful. In such sentences as these, "He was deaf to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely," "Were it ever so fine a day, I would

not go out," the word *ever* is an adverb of degree, and has nothing to do with time. "If I take ever so little of this drug, it will kill me," is equivalent to "however little," or "how little soever I take of this drug, it will kill me." Harrison well says on this point: "Let any one translate one of these phrases into another language, and he will find that 'ever' presents itself as a term expressive of degree, and not of time at all. 'Charm he ever so wisely': Quamvis incantandi sit *peritus* aut *peritissimus*."

Seldom, or never is a common vulgarism. Say "seldom, if ever."

Sit, sat, are much abused words. It is said that the brilliant Irish lawyer, Curran, once carelessly observed in court, "an action lays," and the judge corrected him by remarking: "Lies, Mr. Curran,—hens lay;" but when afterward the judge ordered a counsellor to "set down," Curran retaliated, "Sit down, your honor,—hens set." The retort was characterized by more wit than truth. Hens do not set; they sit. It is not unusual to hear persons say, "The coat sets well"; "The wind sets fair." *Sits* is the proper word. The preterite of *sit* is often incorrectly used for that of *set; e.g.*, "He sat off for Boston."

From thence, from whence. As the adverbs *thence* and *whence* literally supply the place of a noun and preposition, there is a solecism in employing a preposition in conjunction with them.

Conduct. In conversation, this verb is frequently used without the personal pronoun; as, "he conducts well," for "he conducts himself well."

Least, for less. "Of two evils, choose the least."

A confirmed invalid. Can weakness be strong? If not, how can a man be a *confirmed*, or strengthened, invalid?

Proposition, for proposal. This is not a solecism, but, as a univocal word is preferable to one that is equivocal, *proposal*, for a thing offered or proposed, is better than *proposition*. Strictly, a proposal is something offered to be done; a proposition is something submitted to one's consideration. *E.g.*, "He rejected the proposal of his friend;" "he demonstrated the fifth proposition in Euclid."

Previous, for previously. "Previous to my leaving America."

Appreciates, for rises in value. "Gold appreciated yesterday." Even the critical London Athenæum is guilty of this solecism. It says: "A book containing personal reminiscences of one of our great schools appeals to a public limited, no doubt, but certain, and sure *to appreciate*."

Proven for proved, and *plead* for pleaded, are clearly vulgarisms.

Bound, for ready or determined. "I am bound to do it." We may say properly that a ship is "bound to Liverpool"; but in that case we do not employ, as many suppose, the past participle of the verb *to bind*, but the old northern participial adjective, *buinn*, from the verb, *at bua*, signifying "to make ready, or prepare." The term is strictly a nautical one, and to employ it in a sense that unites the significations both of *buinn* and the English participle *bound* from *bind*, is a plain abuse of language.

No, for not. *E.g.*, "Whether I am there or no." Cowper writes:

> "I will not ask Jean Jacques Rousseau,
> Whether birds confabulate or no."

By supplying the ellipsis, we shall see that *not* is here

the proper word. "Whether birds confabulate, or do not confabulate," "whether I am there, or not there." *No* never properly qualifies a verb.

Such for so. *E.g.*, "I never saw such a high spire." This means, "I never saw a high spire of such a form," or "of such architecture" whereas the speaker, in all probability, means only that he never saw *so* high a spire. *Such* denotes quality; *so*, degree.

Incorrect orthography. Orthography means "correct writing, or spelling." "Incorrect orthography" is, therefore, equivalent to "incorrect correct writing."

How for that. "I have heard *how* some critics have been pacified with claret and a supper."

Directly, for as soon as. "Directly he came, I went away with him."

Equally as well, for equally well. *E.g.*, "It will do equally as well."

Supplement, used as a verb. There is considerable authority for this use of the word; but it is a case where usage is clearly opposed to the very principles of the language.

Greet and *greeting* are often improperly used. A greeting is a salutation; to say, therefore, as newspaper reporters often do, that a speaker in the Legislature, or on the platform, was "greeted with hisses," or "with groans," is a decided "malapropism."

To a degree is a phrase often used by English writers and speakers. *E.g.*, "Mr. Gladstone is sensitive to a degree." To what degree?

Farther for *further*. "Farther" is the comparative of far, and should be used in speaking of bodies relatively at rest; as, "Jupiter is farther from the earth than

Mars." "*Further*" is the comparative of "forth," and should be used when motion is expressed; as "He ran further than you."

Quite for very. *E.g.*, In Mrs. Stowe's "Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands," we read: "The speeches were *quite* interesting"; "we had *quite* a sociable time up in the gallery"; and we are told that at Mrs. Cropper's, "in the evening, *quite* a circle came in," etc., etc. The true meaning of "quite" is *completely, entirely.*

Effluvium. The plural of this word is often used as if it meant bad odors; whereas an "effluvium" may be a stream either of pure air or of foul air,— of pure water or of impure, etc.

None is a contraction of *no one*, and therefore to say "none are," or "none were," is just as improper as to say "no one are," or "no one were."

I watched him do it. This is an impropriety of speech rarely heard in this country, but often in England.

Looks beautifully. In spite of the frequency with which this impropriety has been censured, one hears it almost daily from the lips of educated men and women. The error arises from confounding *look* in the sense of to direct the eye, and look in the sense of to seem, to appear. In English, many verbs take an adjective with them to form the predicate, where in other languages an adverb would be used; *e.g.*, "he fell ill"; "he feels cold"; "her smiles amid the blushes lovelier show." No cultivated person would say, "she is beautifully," or "she seems beautifully," yet these phrases are no more improper than "she looks beautifully." We qualify what a person does by an adverb; what a person *is*, or *seems to be*, by an adjective; *e.g.*, "she looks coldly on him"; "she looks cold."

Leave, as an intransitive verb. *E.g.*, "He left yesterday." Many persons who use this phrase are misled by what they deem the analogous expression, *to write*, *to read*. These verbs express an occupation, as truly as *to run*, *to walk*, *to stand*. In answer to the question, "What is A. B. doing?" it is sufficient to say, "He is reading." Here a complete idea is conveyed, which is not true of the phrase, "He left yesterday."

Myself, for I. *E.g.*, "Mrs. Jones and myself will be happy to dine with you"; "Prof. S. and myself have examined the work." The proper use of *myself* is either as a reflective pronoun, or for the sake of distinction and emphasis; as when Juliet cries, "Romeo, doff thy name, and for that name, which is no part of thee, take all myself"; or, in Milton's paradisiacal hymn: "These are thy glorious works, Parent of Good, Almighty! Thine this universal frame thus wondrous fair! Thyself how wondrous then!"

Restive. This word, which means *inclined to rest*, *obstinate*, *unwilling to go*, is employed, almost constantly, in a sense directly the reverse of this; that is, for restless.

Quantity, for number. *E.g.*, "A quantity of books"; "a quantity of postage stamps." In speaking of a collection, or mass, it is proper to use *quantity;* but in speaking of individual objects, however many, we must use the word number. "A quantity of meat," or "a quantity of iron" is good English, but not "a quantity of bank-notes." We may say "a quantity of wood," but we should say a "number of sticks."

Carnival. This word literally means "Farewell to meat," or, as some etymologists think, "Flesh, be strong!" In Catholic countries it signifies a festival celebrated with

merriment and revelry during the week before Lent. In this country, especially in newspaper use, it is employed in the sense of fun, frolic, spree, festival; and that so generally as almost to have banished some of these words from the language. If many persons are skating, that is a carnival; so, if they take a sleigh-ride, or if there is a rush to Long Branch in the summer. As we have a plenty of legitimate words to describe these festivities, the use of this outlandish term has not a shadow of justification.

All of them. As *of* here means *out of*, corresponding with the Latin preposition *e*, or *ex*, it cannot be correct to say *all of them*. We may say, "take one of them" or "take two of them," or "take them all"; but the phrase we are criticising is wholly unjustifiable.

To allude. Among the improprieties of speech which even those sharp-eyed literary detectives, Alford, Moon, and Gould have failed to pounce upon and pillory, are the misuses of the word that heads this paragraph. Once the verb had a distinct, well defined meaning, but it is now rapidly losing its true signification. *To allude* to a thing,—what is it? Is it not to speak of it *darkly*,—to *hint* at it playfully (from *ludo*, *ludere*,—to play), without any direct mention? Yet the word is used in a sense directly opposite to this. Suppose you lose in the street some package, and advertise its loss in the newspapers. The person who finds the package is sure to reply to your advertisement by speaking of "the package you alluded to in your advertisement," though you have alluded to nothing, but have told your story in the most distinct and straightforward manner possible, without an approximation to a hint or innuendo. Newspaper reporters, by their abuse of this unhappy word, will transform a bold and daring speech in

Congress, in which a senator has taken some bull by the horns,—in other words, dealt openly and manfully with the subject discussed,—into a heap of dark and mysterious innuendoes. The honorable gentleman *alluded to* the currency—to the war—to Andrew Johnson—to the New Orleans massacre; he *alluded to* the sympathizers with the South, though he denounced them in the most caustic terms; he *alluded to* the tax-bill, and he *alluded to* fifty other things, about every one of which he spoke out his mind in emphatic and unequivocal terms. An English journal tells a ludicrous story of an M.P. who, his health having been drunk by name, rose on his legs, and spoke of "the flattering way in which he had been alluded to." Another public speaker spoke of a book which had been *alluded to* by name. But the climax of absurdity in the use of this word was attained by an Irish M.P., who wrote a life of an Italian poet. Quoting Byron's lines about "the fatal gift of beauty," he then goes on to talk about "the fatal gift which has been already alluded to!"

Either alternative. E.g., "You may take either alternative." "Two alternatives were presented to me." *Alternative* evidently means a choice,—one choice,—between two things. If there be only one offered, we say there is *no alternative. Two alternatives* is, therefore, a palpable contradiction in terms; yet some speakers talk of "several alternatives" having been presented to them.

Whole, for all. The "Spectator" says: "The Red-Cross Knight runs through the whole steps of the Christian life." Alison, who is one of the loosest writers in our literature, declares, in his "History of the French Revolution," that "the whole Russians are inspired with the belief that their mission is to conquer the world." This

can only mean that those Russians who are entire,— who have not lost a leg, an arm, or some other part of the body, — are inspired with the belief of which he speaks. *Whole* refers to the component parts of a single body, and is therefore singular in meaning.

Jeopardize. There is considerable authority for this word, which is beginning to supplant the good old English word *jeopard.* But why is it more needed than *perilize*, *hazardize?*

Preventative, for preventive; *conversationalist*, for converser; *underhanded*, for underhand; *casuality*, for casualty; *speciality*, for specialty; *leniency*, for lenity; *firstly*, for first; are all base coinages, barbarisms which should be excommunicated by "bell, book, and candle."

Dangerous, for in danger. A leading Boston paper says of a deceased minister: "His illness was only of a week's duration, and was pleurisy and rheumatism. He was not supposed to be dangerous."

Nice. One of the most offensive barbarisms now prevalent is the use of this as a pet word to express almost every kind of approbation, and almost every quality. Strictly, *nice* can be used only in a subjective, not in an objective, sense; though both of our leading lexicographers approve of such expressions as "a nice bit of cheese." Of the vulgarity of such expressions as "a nice man" (meaning a good or pleasing man), "a nice day," "a nice party," etc., there cannot be a shadow of doubt. "A nice man" means a fastidious man; a "nice letter" is a letter very delicate in its language. Some persons are more nice than wise. Archdeacon Hare complains that "this characterless domino," as he stigmatizes the word *nice*, is continually used by his countrymen, and that "a universal deluge of *niaserie*

(for the word was originally *niais*) threatens to whelm the whole island." The Latin word *elegans* seems to have had a similar history; being derived from *elego*, and meaning primarily *nice* or *choice*, and subsequently *elegant*.

Mutual, for common, or reciprocal. Dean Alford justly protests against the stereotyped vulgarism, "a mutual friend." Mutual is applicable to sentiments and acts, but not to persons. Two friends may have a mutual love, but for either to speak of a third person as being "their mutual friend," is sheer nonsense. Yet Dickens entitled one of his novels, "Our Mutual Friend."

Stopping, for staying. "The Hon. John Jones is stopping at the Sherman House." In reading such a statement as this, we are tempted to ask, When will Mr. Jones stop stopping? A man may stop a dozen times at a place, or on a journey, but he cannot *continue* stopping. One may stop at a hotel without becoming a guest. The true meaning of the word *stop* was well understood by the man who did not invite his professed friend to visit him: "If you come, at any time, within ten miles of my house, just stop."

Trifling minutiæ. Archbishop Whately, in his "Rhetoric," speaks of "trifling minutiæ of style." In like manner, Henry Kirke White speaks of his poems as being "the juvenile efforts of a youth," and Disraeli, the author of "The Curiosities of Literature," speaks of "the battles of logomachy," and of "the mysteries of the arcana of alchemy." The first of these phrases may be less palpably tautological than the other three; yet as *minutiæ* means nearly the same things as *trifles*, a careful writer would be as adverse to using such an expression as Whately's, as he would be to talking, like Sir Archibald Alison, of representa-

tive institutions as having been reëstablished in our time "by the influence of English *Anglo*mania."

Indices, for indexes. "We have examined our indices," etc., say the Chicago abstract-makers. *Indices* are algebraic signs; tables of contents are indexes.

Rendition, for rendering. *E.g.*, "Mr. Booth's rendition of Hamlet was admirable." *Rendition* means surrender, giving up, relinquishing to another; as when we speak of the rendition of a beleaguered town to the besieger, or of a pledge upon the satisfaction of a debt.

Extend, for give. Lecture committees, instead of simply inviting a public speaker, or giving him an invitation, almost universally *extend* an invitation; perhaps, because he is generally at a considerable distance. Richard Grant White says pertinently; "As extend (from *ex* and *tendo*) means merely to stretch forth, it is much better to say that a man put out, offered, or stretched forth his hand than that he extended it. Shakespeare makes the pompous, pragmatical *Malvolio* say: 'I extend my hand to him thus'; but 'Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself.' This, however, is a question of taste, not of correctness."

Except, for unless. *E.g.*, "No one, except he has served an apprenticeship, need apply." The former word is a preposition, and must be followed by a noun or pronoun, and not by a proposition.

Couple, for a pair or brace. When two persons or things are joined or linked together, they form a *couple*. The number of things that can be coupled is comparatively small, yet the expression is in constant use; as "a couple of books," "a couple of partridges," "a couple of

weeks," etc. One might as well speak of "a pair of dollars."

Every. *E.g.*, "I have every confidence in him"; "they rendered me every assistance." *Every* denotes all the individuals of a number greater than two, separately considered. Derived from the Anglo-Saxon, *æfer*, ever, *ælc*, each, it means each of all, not all in mass. By "every confidence" is meant simply perfect confidence; by "every assistance," all possible assistance.

Almost, as an adjective. Prof. Whitney, in his able work on "Language, and the Study of Language," speaks of "the almost universality of instruction among us."

Condign. *E.g.*, "He does not deserve the condign punishment he has received." As the meaning of *condign* is that which is deserved, we have here a contradiction in terms, the statement being equivalent to this: "he does not deserve the deserved punishment he has received."

Paraphernalia. This is a big, sounding word from the Greek, which some newspaper writers are constantly misusing. It is strictly a law-term, and means whatever the wife brings with her at marriage in addition to her dower. Her dress and her ornaments are *paraphernalia.* To apply the term to an Irishman's sash on St. Patrick's day, or to a Freemason's hieroglyphic apron, it has been justly said, is not only an abuse of language, but a clear invasion of woman's rights.

Setting-room, for sitting-room, is a gross vulgarism, which is quite common, even with those who deem themselves *nice* people. "I saw your children in the setting-room, as I went past," said a well-dressed woman in our hearing, in a horse-car. How *could* she go *past?* It is

not difficult to go *by* any object; but to go *past* is a contradiction in terms.

An innumerable number is an absurd expression, which is used by some persons,— not, it is to be hoped, "an innumerable number" of times.

Seraphim, for seraph; the plural for the singular. Even Addison says: "The zeal of the seraphim breaks forth," etc. This is as ludicrous as the language of the Indiana justice, who spoke of "the first claw of the statute," or the answer of the man who, when asked whether he had no politics, replied, "Not a single politic."

People, for persons, "Many people think so." Better, persons; people means a body of persons regarded collectively, a nation.

Off of, for off. "Cut a yard off of the cloth."

More perfect, most perfect. What shall be said of these and similar forms of expression? Doubtless they should be discouraged, though used by Shakespeare and Milton. It may be argued in their favor, that, though not logically correct, yet they are rhetorically so. It is true that, as "twenty lions cannot be more twenty than twenty flies," so nothing can be more perfect than perfection. But we do not object to say that one man is *braver* than another, or *wiser*, though, if we had an absolute standard of bravery or wisdom,— that is, a clear idea of them,— we should pronounce either of the two persons to be simply brave or not brave, wise or not wise. We say that Smith is a *better* man than Jones, though no one is absolutely good but God. These forms are used because language is inadequate to express the intensity of the thought,— as in Milton's "most wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best," or the lines,

"And *in the lowest deep a lower deep*,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven."

Milton abounds in these illogical expressions, as do the best Greek poets; and one of the happiest verses in the poems of W. W. Story is a similar intentional contradiction, as

"Of every noble work the silent part is best;
Of all expression, that which cannot be expressed."

Ugly, for ill-tempered. A leading New York divine is reported as saying of an ill-tempered child, that "he wants all he sees, and screams if he does not get it; ugly as he can be, no matter who is disturbed by it."

Is, for are. One of the most frequent blemishes in English prose is the indiscriminate use of singulars and plurals. *E.g.*, Junius writes: "Both minister and magistrate is compelled to choose between his duty and his reputation." Even Lindley Murray writes: "Their general scope and tendency is not remembered at all"; and Milton sings:

"For their mind and spirit remains invincible."

Some grammarians defend these forms of expression on the ground that when two or more nouns singular represent a *single* idea, the verb to which they are the nominative may be put in the singular. The answer to this is, that if the nouns express the *same* idea, one of them is superfluous; if *different* ideas, then they form a plural, and the verb should be plural also. Another quibble employed to justify such expressions, is that the verb, which is expressed after the last noun, is considered as understood *after* the first. But we are not told how this process of subaudition can go on in the mind of the reader,

before he knows what the verb is to be; and while ellipsis not only is in many cases permissible, but gives conciseness and energy to style, yet there is a limit beyond which it cannot be pushed without leading to literary anarchy.

Caption, for heading. *E.g.*, "The caption of this newspaper article." *Caption* means that part of a legal instrument which shows where, when, and by what authority it was taken, found, or executed.

To extremely maltreat. This phrase from Trench is an example of a very common solecism. *To*, the sign of the infinitive, should never be separated from the verb. Say "to maltreat extremely," or "extremely to maltreat."

Accord, for grant. "He accorded them (or to them) all they asked for." *To accord with* means properly to agree or to suit; as, "He accorded with my views."

Enthuse, a word used by some clergymen, is not to be found either in Worcester's Dictionary or in Webster's "Unabridged."

Personalty. This word is supposed by some persons to mean articles worn on one's person. Some years ago, a lady, in England, who had made this mistake, and who wished to leave to her servant her clothing, jewels, etc., described them as her *personalty*, and unwittingly included in her bequest ten thousand pounds.

Do. This verb is often used incorrectly as a substitute for other verbs; as, "I did not say, as some have done." We may properly say, "I did not say, as some do" (*say*), for here the ellipsis of the preceding verb may be supplied.

On to, for on, or upon. "He got on to an omnibus;" "He jumped on to a chair." The preposition *to* is superfluous. Say, "He got upon an omnibus," etc. Some per-

sons speak of "continuing on," which is as objectionable as "He went to Boston for to see the city."

Older, for elder. *Older* is properly applied to objects, animate and inanimate; *elder*, to rational beings.

Overflown, for overflowed. "The river has overflown." *Flowed* is the participle of "to flow"; *flown*, of "to fly."

Spoonsful, for spoonfuls, and *effluvia* for effluvium, are very common errors. "A disagreeable effluvia" is as gross a mistake as "an inexplicable phenomena."

Scarcely, for hardly. *Scarcely* pertains to quantity; *hardly*, to degree; as, "There is scarcely a bushel"; "I shall hardly finish my job by night-fall."

Fare thee well, which has Byron's authority, is plainly wrong.

Community, for the community; as "Community will not submit to such outrages." Prof. Marsh has justly censured this vulgarism. Who would think of saying, "Public is interested in this question"? When we *personify* common nouns used definitely in the singular number, we may omit the article, as when we speak of the doings of Parliament, or of Holy Church. "During the Revolution," says Professor M., "while the federal government was a body of doubtful authority and permanence, . . . the phrase used was always '*the* Congress,' and such is the form of expression in the Constitution itself. But when the Government became consolidated, and Congress was recognized as the paramount legislative power of the Union, . . . it was personified, and the article dropped, and, in like manner, the word Government is often used in the same way."

Folks for folk. As *folk* implies plurality, the *s* is needless.

Mussulmen. Mussulman is not a compound of man, and, therefore, like *German*, it forms its plural by adding *s*.

Drive, for ride. A lady says that "she is going to drive in the park," when she intends that her servant shall drive (not her, but) the horses.

Try and, for try to. *E.g.*, "Try and do it."

Whole, *entire*, *complete*, and *total*, are words which are used almost indiscriminately by many persons. That is *whole*, from which nothing has been taken; that is *entire*, which has not been divided; that is *complete*, which has all its parts. *Total* refers to the aggregate of the parts. Thus we say, a *whole* loaf of bread; an *entire* set of spoons; a *complete* harness; the *total* cost or expense.

Succeed, for give success to, or cause to succeed. *E.g.*, "If Providence succeed us in this work." Both Webster and Worcester justify this use of *succeed* as a transitive verb; but if not now grammatically objectionable, as formerly, it is still to be avoided on the ground of ambiguity. In the phrase quoted, *succeed* may mean either cause to succeed, or follow.

Tartar should be, strictly, *Tatar*. When the Tatar hordes, in the thirteenth century, burst forth from the Asiatic steppes, this fearful invasion was thought to be a fulfilment of the prediction of the opening of the bottomless pit, as portrayed in the ninth chapter of Revelations. To bring the name into relation with Tartarus, *Tatar* was written, as it still continues to be written, *Tartar*.

The following is an example of a very common error in the arrangement of words:

"Dead in sins and in transgressions
Jesus cast his eyes on me,
And of his divine possessions
Bade me then a sharer be:" etc.

Though such is not the writer's intention, he really speaks of Jesus as being "dead in sins and in transgressions"; for the syntax of the verse admits of no other meaning.

Numerous, for many. To speak of "our numerous friends" is to say that each friend is numerous.

That of; as, "He chose for a profession *that of* the law." This is equivalent to saying: He chose for a profession the profession of law; or, he chose a profession for a profession. Why not say, "He chose law for a profession"?

Fellow countrymen. What is the difference between "countrymen" and "fellow countrymen?"

Distinguish, for discriminate. To distinguish is to mark broad and plain differences; to discriminate is to notice minute and subtle shades of difference.

Transpire, for to happen. "Transpire" meant originally to emit insensible vapor through the pores of the skin. Afterward it was used metaphorically in the sense of to become known, to pass from secrecy into publicity. But to say that a certain event "transpired yesterday," meaning that it occurred then, is a gross vulgarism.

Ventilate, for discuss.

Hung, for hanged. "Hang," when it means to take away life by public execution, is a regular verb.

Bid, for bade. *E.g.*, The London "Times" says: "He called his servants, and *bid* them procure fire-arms."

Dare, for durst. "Neither her maidens nor the priest *dare* speak to her for half an hour," says the Rev. Charles Kingsley, in one of his novels.

In, for within. *E.g.*, "Is Mr. Smith in?"

Notwithstanding, for although. *E.g.*, "*Notwithstanding*

they fought bravely, they were defeated." "Notwithstanding" is a preposition, and cannot be correctly used as a conjunction.

Two good ones. "Among all the apples there were but two good ones." Two *ones?*

Raising the rent, for increasing the rent. A landlord notified his tenant that he should raise his rent. "Thank you," was the reply; "I find it very hard to raise it myself."

Was, for is. "Two young men," says Swift, "have made a discovery, that there was a God." That there *was* a God? When? This year, or last year, or ages ago? All general truths should be expressed by the use of verbs in the present tense.

Shall and *will.* There are, perhaps, no two words in the language which are more frequently confounded or used inaccurately, than *shall* and *will.* Certain it is, that of all the rocks on which foreigners split in the use of the Queen's English, there is none which so puzzles and perplexes them as the distinction between these little words. Originally both words were employed for the same purpose in other languages of the same stock with ours; but their use has been worked out by the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons, until it has attained a degree of nicety remarkable in itself, and by no means easy of acquisition even by the subjects of Victoria or by Americans. Every one has heard of the Dutchman who, on falling into a river, cried out, "I will drown, and nobody shall help me." The Irish are perpetually using *shall* for *will*, while the Scotch use of *will* for *shall* is equally inveterate and universal. Dr. Chalmers says: "I am not able to devote as much time and attention to other subjects as I will be under the neces-

sity of doing next winter." The use of *shall* for *will*, in the following passage, has led some critics strongly to suspect that the author of the anonymous work, "Vestiges of Creation," is a Scotchman: "I do not expect that any word of praise which this work may elicit shall ever be responded to by me; or that any word of censure shall ever be parried or deprecated." This awkward use of *shall*, we have seen, is not a Scotticism; yet it is curious to see how a writer who pertinaciously shrouds himself in mystery, may be detected by the blundering use of a monosyllable. So the use of the possessive neuter pronoun *its* in the poems which Chatterton wrote and palmed off as the productions of one Rowlie, a monk in the fifteenth century, betrayed the forgery,—inasmuch as that little monosyllable, *its*, now so common and convenient, did not find its way into the language till about the time of Shakespeare. Milton never once uses it, nor, except as a misprint, is it to be found anywhere in the Bible.

Gilfillan, a Scotch writer, thus uses *will* for shall: "If we look within the rough and awkward outside, we will be richly rewarded by its perusal." So Alison, the historian: "We know to what causes our past reverses have been owing, and we will have ourselves to blame if they are again incurred." Macaulay observes that "not one Londoner in a thousand ever misplaces his *will* and *shall*. Doctor Robinson could, undoubtedly, have written a luminous dissertation on the use of those words. Yet, even in his latest work, he sometimes misplaced them ludicrously." But Doctor Johnson was a Londoner, and he did not always use his *shalls* and *wills* correctly, as will be seen by the following extract from a letter to Boswell in 1774: "You must make haste and gather me all you can, and do it

quickly, or I *will* and *shall* do without it." In this anti-climax Johnson meant to emphasize the latter of the auxiliaries. But *shall* (Saxon, *sceal*=*necesse est*) in the first person, simply foretells; as, "I shall go to New York to-morrow." On the other hand, *will*, in the first person, not only foretells, but promises, or declares the resolution to do a thing; as, "I will pay you what I owe you." The Doctor should have said: "I shall and will do without it," putting the strongest term last. The confusion of the two words is steadily increasing in this country. Formerly the only Americans who confounded them were Southerners; now, the misuse of the word is stealing through the North. *E.g.*, "I will go to town to-morrow, and shall take an early opportunity of calling on your friend there." "We will never look on his like again." A writer in a New York paper says: "None of our coal mines are deep, but the time is coming when we will have to dig deeper in search of both coal and metallic ores." Again, we hear persons speak thus: "Let us keep a sharp lookout, and we will avoid all danger."

Shakespeare rarely confounded the two words; for example, in "Coriolanus":

> "*Cor.* Shall remain!
> Hear you this Triton of the minnows? mark you
> His absolute *shall?*"

Again, in Antony and Cleopatra:

> "*Meno.* Wilt thou be lord of the whole world?
> *Senator.* He shall to the market-place."

Wordsworth, too, who is one of the most accurate writers in our literature, nicely discriminates in his use of *shall* and *will:*

"This child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own.
The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

In the last passage determination is expressed, and therefore *shall* is properly used.

When the Bible was translated, the language was in a state of transition; hence we read in Kings ii: "Ahab shall slay me," for *will*. In Genesis xliii, 3–5, the two words are nicely discriminated. The distinction between them, strange to say, is entirely ignored in the Revised Version; as *e.g.*, Peter is told, "Thou shalt deny me thrice"; and we read: "One of you shall betray me," where futurity only is expressed in the Greek.

According to Grimm, "shall" is derived from *skalan*, the Scandinavian word for the pain of death, which is also the source of our word "kill." The predominant idea in "shall" is that of doom. When choosing a term to express the inevitable future, the founders of our language chose a term the most expressive possible of a fatal, inevitable future. As "shall" contains the idea of doom, "will" conveys the idea of choice. The general rule to be followed in the use of the two words is, that when the simple idea of future occurrence is to be expressed, unconnected with the speaker's resolve, we must use *shall* in the first person, and *will* in the second and third; as, "I shall die, you will die, he will die"; but when the idea of compulsion or necessity is to be conveyed, —a futurity connected with the will of the speaker,— *will* must be employed in the first person, and *shall* in the

second and third; as, "I will go, you shall go, he shall go." "I shall attain to thirty at my next birthday" merely foretells the age to which the speaker will have reached at his next birthday; "I will attain to thirty at my next birthday" would imply a determination to be so old at the time mentioned. "You shall have some money to-morrow" would imply a promise to pay it; "you will have some money to-morrow" would only imply an expectation that the person addressed would receive some money.

Similar to the misuse of *shall* and *will*, is that of *would* for should; as, "You promised that it would be done;" "But for reinforcements we would have been beaten." Mr. Brace, in his work on Hungary, makes the people of that country say of Kossuth: "He ought to have known that we would be ruined,"— which can only mean "we wished to be ruined."

The importance of attending to the distinction of *shall* and *will*, and to the nice distinctions of words generally, is strikingly illustrated by an incident in Massachusetts. In 1844, Abner Rogers was tried in that state for the murder of the warden of the penitentiary. The man who had been sent to search the prisoner, said in evidence: "He (Rogers) said, 'I have fixed the warden, and I'll have a rope round my neck.' On the strength of what he said, I took his suspenders from him." Being cross-examined, the witness said his words were: "I will have a rope," not "I shall have a rope." The counsel against the prisoner argued that he declared an intention of suicide, to escape from the penalty of the law, which he knew he had incurred. On the other hand, *shall* would, no doubt, have been regarded as a betrayal of his consciousness of having

incurred a felon's doom. The prisoner was acquitted on the ground of insanity. Strange that the fate of an alleged murderer should turn upon the question which he used of two little words that are so frequently confounded, and employed one for the other! It would be difficult to conceive of a more pregnant comment on the importance of using words with discrimination and accuracy.

It would be impossible, in the limits to which we are restricted, to give all the nice distinctions to be observed in the use of *shall* and *will*. For a full explanation of the subject we must refer the unlearned reader to the various English grammars, and such works as Sir E. W. Head's treatise on the two words, and the works on Synonyms by Graham, Crabb, and Whately. Prof. Schele DeVere, in his late "Studies in Language," expresses the opinion that this double future is a great beauty of the English language, but that it is impossible to give any rule for its use, which will cover all cases, and that the only sure guide is "that instinct which is given to all who learn a language with their mother's milk, or who acquire it so successfully as to master its spirit as well as its form." His use of *will* for *shall*, in this very work, verifies the latter part of this statement, and shows that a foreigner may have a profound knowledge of the genius and constitution of a language, and yet be sorely puzzled by its niceties and subtleties. "If we go back," he says, "for the purpose of thus tracing the history of nouns to the oldest forms of English, we *will* there find the method of forming them from the first and simplest elements" (page 140). The "Edinburgh Review" denounces the distinction of *shall* and *will*, by their neglect of which the

Scotch are so often bewrayed, as one of the most capricious and inconsistent of all imaginable irregularities, and as at variance not less with original etymology than with former usage. Prof. Marsh regards it as a verbal quibble, which will soon disappear from our language. It is a quibble just as any distinction is a quibble to persons who are too dull, too lazy, or too careless to apprehend it. With as much propriety might the distinction between the indicative and subjunctive forms of the verb, or the distinction between *farther* and *further*, *strong* and *robust*, *empty* and *vacant*, be pronounced a verbal quibble. Sir Edmund W. Head has shown that the difference is not one which has an existence only in the pedagogue's brain, but that it is as real and legitimate as that between *be* and *am*, and dates back as far as Wicliffe and Chaucer, while it has also the authority of Shakespeare.

We conclude this chapter with the following lines by an English poet:

"Beyond the vague Atlantic deep,
Far as the farthest prairies sweep,
Where forest glooms the nerves appall,
Where burns the radiant western fall,
One duty lies on old and young,—
With filial piety to guard,
As on its greenest native sward,
The glory of the English tongue.
That ample speech! That subtle speech!
Apt for the need of all and each:
Strong to endure, yet prompt to bend
Wherever human feelings tend.
Preserve its force,—conserve its powers;
And through the maze of civic life,
In letters, commerce, even in strife,
Forget not it is yours and ours."

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